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Schooling for Sale in Dubai: An Analysis of Schooling Quality and Price

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SCHOOLING FOR SALE IN DUBAI: AN ANALYSIS OF SCHOOLING QUALITY AND PRICE

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ABSTRACT

The use of school inspections by educational authorities in the Arabian Gulf countries is rapidly becoming a chosen practice to 'ensure' good quality schooling in their private sector schools. Simultaneously, there is an emerging trend of linking inspection judgements with school fee increases. Advocates of this policy suggest that this form of 'reward for good performance' encourages poorer performing schools to improve, thus narrowing the gap in access to good quality schooling.

In this context, where public schooling is exclusive to a minority of the population and the majority compulsorily choose from a spectrum of fee charging private schools offering different curricula, most parents are faced with the challenge of purchasing the best quality schooling for their children at prices they can afford. Additionally, policy makers are faced with the challenge of ensuring that market forces within the private sector do not widen access to good quality schooling. A premise of this model of market-provided schooling is that markets optimise the quality of schooling at a given price. This study focuses on the private schooling sector in Dubai as an example of a context in which school fee hikes are linked to school inspection outcomes. It examines the effects of different variables such as school fees and the curriculum offered on the quality of schooling provided.

This study employed quantitative and qualitative techniques. Data on the quality of schooling, was obtained from inspection reports for the fifth year of inspections (2012/2013), in addition to data on fees charged which were obtained from official sources. The affordability of schools' fees was assumed to be an indicator of students' socio-economic status.

The findings of this study confirm the premise of the neo-liberal, market-provided approach to schooling. It suggests that students of a lower socio-economic status are more likely to receive an inferior quality of schooling than those of a higher socio-economic status when controlling for other factors. Thus, this study concludes by primarily suggesting that policy makers pursue alternative methods of both determining and rewarding good quality schooling.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations

AA	Arabic as a first language
AB	Arabic as an additional language
ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
AED	Arab Emirates Dirhams
BSO	British Schools Overseas
CAIS	Canadian Accredited Independent Schools
CfBT	Council for British Teachers
DSC	Dubai Statistics Center
DSIB	Dubai School Inspection Bureau
E	English
ERFs	Evidence Recording Forms
FT	Follow Through Inspection Visits
GBP	Great British Pounds
GCC	Gulf Cooperative Council
GEMS	Global Education Management Systems
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
IB	International Baccalaureate
IE	Islamic Education
ISI	Independent school Inspectorate
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
KQ	Key Questions
M	Mathematics
MENA	Middle East and Northern Africa
MoE	Ministry of Education
NAIS	National Association of Independent Schools
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education
PIRLS	Programme for International Student Assessment
PISA	Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PPP	Public Private Partnership
QI	Quality Indicator
S	Science

SES	Socio-Economic Status
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UAE	United Arab Emirates

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

1.1 Background and Rationale for the Study

1.1.1 United Arab Emirates (UAE) Vision 2021 and Education

In February 2010 the Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai launched the *UAE Vision 2021* under the theme "We want to be among the best countries in the world by 2021" (Ministry of Cabinet Affairs, 2010). This policy document aims at achieving sustainable development unifying the approaches and standards of the private and public sectors to achieve high quality living for Emiratis and residents[1] of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

This Vision is based on four pillars and subsections, which attempt to cover all aspects of life in the UAE. These pillars are:

1. United in Ambition and Responsibility: An ambitious and confident nation grounded in its heritage.
2. United in Destiny: A strong union bonded by a common destiny.
3. United in Knowledge: A competitive economy driven by knowledgeable and innovative Emiratis.
4. United in Prosperity: A nurturing and sustainable environment for quality living (Ibid).

In section 4.2 of *Vision 2021* is a set of statements outlining the vision for education inputs and outcomes in the UAE. The section highlights that:

> "All Emiratis will have equal opportunities and access to first-rate education that allows them to develop into well-rounded individuals, enhance their educational attainment, and achieve their true potential, contributing positively to society" (UAE Federal Cabinet, 2010, p. 23).

[1] All nationalities, except for UAE citizens and GCC (Gulf Cooperative Council) citizens, must obtain a residence visa to legally live and work in Dubai (and other UAE Emirates). For most working expatriates, the employs sponsor them for a residence visa (UAE Government, 2014).

Key parts of this statement have implications that I explore further in the context of Dubai's Kindergarten to Grade 12 / Year 13 private (non-government funded) schools. The statement of promise quoted above focuses on Emirati students, who interestingly, are a small minority within the UAE, in particular in Dubai. This is according to the School Landscape Report (KHDA, 2013d) published by the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in 2012-2013. The KHDA is a regulatory authority in the Government of Dubai and primarily responsible for "the growth, direction and quality of private education and learning in Dubai" (KHDA, 2014a). The KHDA report states that Emirati students comprise only 13.4 per cent of the total percentage of the students in private schools in Dubai (KHDA, 2013d, p. 6). This low percentage means that the remaining 86.6 per cent of students are non-national expatriates. It is clear that the UAE has set out to promise world-class education for its citizens. What about the rest of the students, the expatriate majority? I wanted to investigate the extent of the promise of "equal opportunities and access to first-rate education" (UAE Federal Cabinet, 2010, p. 23), as it is borne out by the provision and outcomes for students at the most popular private schools, with special attention to the cost of schooling. The purpose of focusing on private fee charging schools will be explained below.

In the *Vision 2021* statement there are assumptions of *choice* and *access* for Emirati citizens in the quality of schooling they select for their children. Should any Emirati parent choose to send their child to a school that is 'first rate' or judged as *outstanding*, they enjoy guaranteed placement. This 'priority of enrolment for all' appears to be available to Emiratis who *choose* it. However, this raises the question; how much *freedom* do these parents have to make such a choice? Moreover, how much freedom does any expatriate parent in Dubai have to choose a *good* or *outstanding* quality of schooling for their child? Such choices may be severely restricted by economic, social and other factors.

The ideas of *choice in schooling* and *varied school quality* are implied in the *Vision 2021* statement by the use of terms such as *equal opportunity*, *equal access* and *first-rate education*. If accessing first-rate education were not a genuine *choice* for Emirati parents, then one would assume there would be no need to promise equal opportunity or equal access to it. This could either be as a result of:

- first-rate education being accessible to *all,* and being the default situation*;*
- not being accessible at all, which negates the promise of accessibility; or,
- accessible to limited clients, thus only conditionally accessible.

Likewise, using the descriptor 'first-rate' implies the existence of a mechanism to ensure that educational provision and outcomes are comparatively the best, i.e., rated first. Such a mechanism exists in the form of annual school inspections; this brings into question the notions of school quality used to make such comparisons. As a regular consultant to school inspections in the Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC)[2] region, I question how the relationship between *school quality* and private, fee-charging schools affects parents' choices. Are there *equal opportunities* and *access* to *first-rate education*? Critically, who is to say that a school is *first-rate* simply because inspectors claim so, especially when judgements of school quality are based upon a locally produced Inspection Framework (KHDA, 2012b)? Notions of quality are strongly embedded in national aspirations and social priorities that may or may not be objective. I will refer to this point later on in the study.

Dubai Schools Inspection Bureau (DSIB) is an entity within the KHDA (KHDA, 2007) and the topic of *school quality,* versus *fees* was one that was frequently raised on inspections either in the parents' opinion surveys or during interviews with them. The national newspapers regularly published on this topic. Here are a few comments that represent parents' opinions:

> *"Education has become a money making game, the quality of teaching is not of professional level. Yet you have to shell out a huge amount. Education should be given free and not charged, that way every individual child gets a chance to educate themselves.[…] It's all about the money. […] Bottom line education should be free and not an organisation for making money* [sic]." (Gulf News, 2013b)[3].

[2] The GCC Countries are the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.
[3] Although the authors of most of these quotations were named in the newspaper, they will remain anonymous in this thesis, as the identity of the parents cannot be verified. All quotations are as they appear in the source, including grammatical and spelling errors.

> *"I guess we all have to understand that high cost of rent, travel and such things affect everyone in UAE. Schools have teachers, rents, facilities and all these cost are rising. How will the school pay? The only way is by increasing fees and UAE being a commercial place all school's are a commercial centre which are run for profit and hence school fees are bound to rise and parents must be prepared for the same* [sic]*."* (Gulf News, 2013b).

> *"It is another kind of business which at the end seeks profit. The problem is that it is not controlled like other commodities. Next year my son will start school. Why on earth should school cost me $10,000 for a KG1 class in a rated as GOOD school? I don't want to register him in a fair or acceptable one, but the GOOD ones are very expensive. The OUTSTANDING ones are simply out of reach.* [sic]*."* (Gulf News, 2012b).

> *"All expatriates whose children attend school in the UAE have to pay for the privilege, and a wide variety of schools offer education at very different levels with different syllabuses. The under-supply of school places means that parents cannot shop around that much, and fees charged need to be transparent and fair* [sic]*."* (Gulf News, 2010).

Are parents getting the quality of education they are paying for? Equally, since privately funded schools in Dubai are fee charging, does a more expensive school provide better quality schooling? Ethically, should the cost of schooling prohibit parents from enrolling their children in schools judged as providing *first-rate* education? During its first five years of operation, from September 2008 until May 2013, the DSIB conducted 760 school inspections, from Kindergarten (KG) to Grade 12 / Year 13, covering the 13 different international curricula operating during that time (KHDA, 2013a, 2013b). The curricula on offer in private schools in Dubai

included: the UAE Ministry of Education ('MoE') curriculum, as well as the National Curriculum of England and Wales (the 'UK' curriculum), the US[4] curriculum, the International Baccalaureate ('IB'), Indian, Pakistani, French, Iranian, Russian, German, Philippine and Japanese curricula[5]. Referring to the home country of each curriculum, as is the practice in the KHDA is adopted for this study. However, this is not racist in nature nor does it attempt to make any relation between race and performance. Annually, each school inspection report has been generated following lesson observations, interviews, and analysis of key documents and online opinion surveys of parents, senior students and teachers.

In September 2013 KHDA published a milestone five-year retrospective report (the first quinquennial report) that used the school inspection results from the previous five years to publish trends, strengths and weaknesses in private schools and to provide broad recommendations for improvement in the schools' provision and outcomes. This exhaustive publication, and other KHDA publications, including the school reports, made minimal reference to schools' fees. It did not provide analysis of who attended the better or weaker schools, or any relationship to the fees they charged. In fact, very little has been published about the relationship between school quality and fees in the oil-rich, expatriate dominant GCC countries. Even less has been published about the neoliberal economical context of Dubai and its peculiar educational landscape.

It was important that the data generated and published by the KHDA be revisited and subject to more thorough analyses (i.e., the accumulated five years of individual schools' inspection reports). This is mainly because the analyses presented were incomplete and somewhat superficial. Further, the process was, and remains, politically influenced. I will elaborate on politics later on in this study. I revisited individual schools' inspection reports for the 2012/2013 inspection cycle and examined their findings in light of the fees charged by these same schools.

[4] Although no US national curriculum is in place per se, this term is used by KHDA to refer to any school offering a US state curriculum and the Common Core Standards for mathematics, English and science.

[5] A private Lebanese school provides an independent curriculum called SABIS, as UK because the students sit for the IGCSE and A Level external examinations.

1.1.2 Research and education in the Arabian Gulf

In 1966, when Coleman et al. (1966) published their controversial report *Equality of Educational Opportunity,* better known as *The Coleman Report*, Dubai was yet an independent Trucial State with only seven schools (Heard-Bey, 2004). These schools offered basic education in mathematics, writing, reading and Islamic studies that were modelled on the Kuwaiti schools and funded jointly by wealthy local merchants and the "humble Dubai government" (Kazim, 2000, p. 245). Nearly 50 years on, Dubai is the largest international business hub in the Middle East (Davidson, 2008) with a booming post 'Arab Spring' economy (The National, 2013), a growing expatriate population (United Nations: Department of Economics and Social Affairs, 2012) and a unique educational landscape, which I will describe shortly. During these past 50 years there has been very little independent, critical research (Buchmann and Hannum, 2001) into the factors contributing to educational outcomes conducted in the Arabian Gulf countries (Hokal and Shaw, 1999); even less addressing the social or economic factors affecting school provision and outcomes. It is only recently that researchers have examined the educational landscape and asked questions regarding educational outcomes such as those posed by Coleman et al. in 1966.

For example, a conference paper presented by Bouhlila (2013) attempted to identify the external factors that affect educational outcomes in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA) regions. She used the only publicly available data to cover a large number of MENA and GCC countries: the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS). Bouhlila's analysis of the data showed that the Hynemean-Loxely thesis was not fully supported across most of the MENA countries, concluding that in the low to middle income countries socio-economic status (SES) had more of an effect on students' outcomes than schools' resources. This is not a particularly surprising finding. Indeed, in England recent research attributes educational achievement more to parental influences than school effects (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2008). Bouhlila concluded that in some oil-rich Gulf countries there was a "total contradiction with the mentioned effect, where school resources seem to matter more than the SES in students' performance" (Bouhlila, 2013, p. 24). Bouhlila was not specific about the type of

schooling; it is not clear if the data refers to publically funded, or fee-based schools. Most likely it was a combination, thus not identifying any differences between public and private outcomes. If the SES of students had an effect upon schools' resources and provision, would these in turn effect students' academic outcomes? Bouhlila did not elaborate due to a lack of data, as only five of six GCC countries participated in the 2007 TIMSS, namely Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia. The UAE did not participate but the Emirate of Dubai participated as a 'benchmarking participant' (IEA, 2014). Until 2007 only one or two GCC countries participated in TIMSS; therefore there were no consistent data for the GCC, including Dubai, during the TIMSS tests in 1995, 1999 and 2005 (IEA, 2014). This lack of longitudinal data, specifically for Dubai, limited Bouhlila's study and thus her findings. Bouhlila noted that her focus on the Gulf countries was restricted due to the lack of sufficient data, specifically from Dubai (Bouhlila, 2013, p. 11).

In this study I join the discussion regarding the quality of education and access to it in the GCC. I focus on Dubai and examine school fees and the associated quality of schooling. As did Bouhlila, I use public data. However, I draw upon more consistently available public data on school quality in Dubai that were collected annually from every private school for five years. Information in the public domain about schools' provision and outcomes, in school inspection reports and tuition fee data are both analysed. This study is not free of shortcomings when using these data, as inspection methods and outcomes have long been criticised in academic literature. More specifically, inter-rater reliability issues that lead to questions around the validity of the DSIB's statistics and publications. The inspections and the resulting data are government controlled and thus vulnerable to political influence. Despite these shortcomings, the findings are determining factors that are used by policy makers in the Government. Both the inspection findings and school publications will serve as starting points for my research. It is important to note that the KHDA publications and policies are based upon school inspection findings, as the Government of Dubai defines school quality, weaknesses not withstanding.

1.2 Private Schooling in the Context of Dubai

1.2.1 Emirati nationals and the welfare state

The United Arab Emirates was established in 1971 after the withdrawal of the British, and consists of seven Sheikhdoms united under the federal rule of Abu Dhabi's Sheikhs. These Sheikdoms, now known as *Emirates,* are Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Fujairah, Um-Al-Quwain and Ras Al-Khaima. Once united leaders were quick to set up a political system that was traditional and Islamic based, an economic system that was funded initially on oil revenues and a social system that was primarily aimed at *tawteen*[6] by focusing on creating a national identity. Central to this was a government funded and controlled education system aimed at realigning the loyalty of Emiratis to the new nation, rather than their tribes or regions (Davidson, 2005). It was the ideal platform upon which the new government would shape its youth. However, there were steadily increasing numbers of non-Islamic Arabic speaking expatriate children in the country who did not have access to the Islamic and Arabic language government schools. This resulted in the establishment of private, fee charging schools that catered mainly to the expatriate community. These schools were mostly co-educational, offered the curricula of their home countries and were mostly independent of the UAE government.

Emirati citizens were the recipients of a large number of incentives provided by the newly united and independent UAE government. These included free health care and schooling, higher education, marriage funds, subsidised housing, water and electricity, tax free salaries, Hajj[7] funds, child support, gender related birth funds, retirement funds and divorce funds, to name just a few. Although these privileges continue to this day and are exclusive to Emirati nationals, Davidson (2005, 2008, 2011, 2012), Kazim (2000), Hawley (2007) and other GCC political scientists argue that the UAE's welfare state is sustained by the monarchy in order to maintain their power. This is done through the strictly monitored distribution of wealth, with the rulers aggrandising vast amount of the oil wealth personally (Davidson, 2005). Since 1972 the UAE government has provided free schooling and higher education to its

[6] Tawteen in Arabic, literally meaning to 'nationalise', i.e. to "make into a nation". This was a process by which the Beduin and other tribes in the newly established UAE were encouraged to move from the tribal desert territories and settle in cities and towns. Many were given UAE citizenship.

[7] Hajj is an Arabic term that describes an annual pilgrimage that able Muslims are required to make at least once in their lifetime. The Hajj takes place in Saudi Arabia at Makka.

citizens. In some cases students were provided with a monthly allowance, uniforms, books and transportation (Bahgat, 1999) by the government. However, the tax-free public services provided to Emiratis come at a cost, as argued by many politicians and political scientists (Davidson, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2012; Koury, 1980; Kazim, 2000 and Looney, 2005). One of the most controversial points is the relationship boundary between the ruling families and the public. Bahgat (1999, p. 130) views it as "the former providing for the latter" and states that in such a situation "there is very little room for academic and political freedom" (Bahgat, 1999, p. 130). This is a powerful argument supported by much evidence. Whoever may be in receipt of 'welfare' must choose to accept the limitations placed upon them by the state. This is amply shown by the relatively limited amount of independent, critical research published in the region (US Department of State, 2014).

The oil-rich, tax-free welfare state created by the leaders means that educational provision remains the government's responsibility, freeing its citizens from any responsibility for school fees. The sudden wealth of this once poor country placed it in a unique position amongst other less developed countries from 1970s to the early 1990s specifically. During this time the UAE's oil-funded government avoided charging fees for schooling, unlike poorer less developed countries. The government easily absorbed the increasing costs of building and maintaining schools. This was not the case in countries such as Malawi in the 1980s or Ghana in the 1990s, whose public schools were partly funded by user fees, as part of the World Bank's financial aid conditions for education (Klees, 2008).

1.2.2 The expatriate workforce and neoliberalism

Like other Gulf States, the UAE has relied upon a substantial expatriate workforce in the last 35 years. This has been most evident in Dubai, as it has undergone significant socio-economic development, with the influx of expatriate workers from all over the globe. This influx, according to Davidson (2008, p. 58) was "mainly encouraged by the economic boom and prospect of making money." After the so-called 'Arab Spring' of 2011 it has been a safe heaven for those seeking political and social stability, and for the wealthier Arabs a destination for investment and trade. The UAE and other GCC countries have relied heavily upon expatriate labour, as their

indigenous populations are relatively small and insufficiently skilled (Koury, 1980; Davidson, 2008, 2011; Kazim, 2000) to undertake the rapid development these countries have been experiencing. The ambitious desire of the rulers to create modern infrastructures, globally competitive markets and a high standard of living for their citizens meant that they needed to depend upon the expatriates.

Expatriate workers in Dubai are from over 170 nations. The government's original preference for single male workers created an imbalanced social structure, leading to a policy of allowing family sponsorships from the late 1990's onwards. This has turned Dubai into a multi-national city of families seeking good quality and affordable education for their children. However, the well-established, comprehensive social welfare state and its privileges remain exclusive to Emirati citizens. This created a society divided in status and privilege: Emiratis and expatriate residents. Consequently "a sense of favouritism and state-sponsored social inequity" (Davidson, 2012, p. 58) arose, illustrated by the newspaper quotations earlier in the chapter. Such a division is the norm in most countries, wherein visitors are not entitled to the benefits granted to nationals. Since the UAE does not tax earnings, expatriates cannot complain that the subsidised minority is the beneficiary of their earnings.

The uniqueness of the UAE's large expatriate work force is seen in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Estimated percentage of expatriates in relation to each country's population as of 2011 UN figures (US Department of State, 2011)

Estimate percentage of expatriates in relation to entire population	Oman	Saudi Arabia	Bahrain	Kuwait	Qatar	UAE
	18	25	48	67	80	89

The UAE hosts the highest ratio of expatriates in the GCC region. The expatriate workforce is concentrated in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Dubai's demographics indicate that almost 90 per cent of its population is expatriate. This makes for an interesting multinational social construct that is also reflected in its schools, and is worthy of examining closer.

Immigration laws make it almost impossible for an expatriate to gain UAE citizenship[8], and by implication they are only guests in the country, be it for one or 30 years of employment. This makes it impossible for expatriates to contribute financially to the government in order to benefit from its welfare system, including education (Looney, 2005; Hawley, 2007; Mills, 2008). This policy ensures the privileged status of the Emirati minorities. For the expatriates, a neoliberal economic situation is fashioned. Consequently, two systems work in parallel: a welfare state for the Emiratis and a neoliberal state for expatriates who, having accepted the working conditions, are expected to provide for themselves each according to their ability. In broad terms, I adopt the meaning of neoliberalism in this study as "the agenda of economic and social transformation under the sign of the free market" (Connell, 2013, p. 100).

The neoliberal economic model in Dubai has not risen out of mistrust towards the government's ability to provide services, as is the case in some countries (Apple, 2006; Campbell, Proctor and Sherington, 2009). Nor is it the neoliberalism that has been described as a movement committed to "markets and to freedom" as "individual choice" (Apple, 2007, p. 211) by neoliberals who are set out, as Apple puts it to "… 'reform' education" (2000, p. 59). Rather, it is a result of providing welfare services to a privileged minority of the population, UAE citizens. This policy imposed a neoliberal context for the majority expatriate workers, an unusual scenario. Private enterprise aimed purely at enhancing the profit motive rather than mainly providing a service. This scenario fits nicely with Tooley's (2000) observation that "private education has emerged in forms which are relatively unknown in the developed world" (Tooley, 2000, p. 205). Indeed, Dubai's *neoliberalism* may be a façade since many of the real freedoms enjoyed in the Western democracies are not available. There is an oligarchic government whose rule is predicated on religion, whilst maintaining a capitalist approach to wealth creation (Davidson, 2005, 2008, 2012). Inherent in these structures are many obvious logical contradictions that make comparative analyses difficult. Nonetheless, if one were to consider the term

[8] As per Naturalization and Citizenship laws https://www.abudhabi.ae/portal/faces/en/citizens/citizenship_and_residence/citizenship_documents?_adf.ctrl-state=kil48qoyj_4&_afrLoop=1483668509256650

neoliberalism in a context of "making existing markets wider" (Connell, 2013, p.100), then this fits the description of expanding the private schooling sector that was already in existence before the dominance of the free market forces in recent decades. On the other hand, if one were to consider neoliberalism as "creat[ing] new markets where they did not exist before" (Connell, 2013, p100), then this does not appear to fit the context of this study.

The demographic imbalance between UAE nationals and expatriates is reflected in Dubai's schools. They have gone from a majority of government funded schools to an overwhelming majority of privately owned, fee charging schools for the expatriate children who are unable to access the free government schooling. Private schooling in such a context is unique. This is not the result of a neoliberal movement of marketization and privatisation of government schools through voucher systems, choice plans for parents or other reforms, such as charter schools as is the case in the UK, USA or Australia (McNeil, 2000; Levin and Belfield, 2003; Apple, 2007; Campbell, Proctor and Sherington, 2009). It is not expatriate parents abandoning seemingly poor quality public schools for better quality private ones, or the associated networking opportunities and social status (Brunello and Rocco, 2008). It is a stand-alone homemade system of neoliberal schooling. It is thus difficult to locate this system of private schooling in the current literature regarding school privatisation, as defined by those such as Ball (2004; 2007), Brunello and Rocco (2008), Campbell, Proctor and Sherington (2009), Rizvi and Lingard (2010), Moujaes, Hoteit, & Hiltunen (2011) and Lewin (2014). I will elaborate on this difficulty in the next chapter.

The KHDA estimates that 255,000 students, i.e. 88.9 per cent of Dubai's students, attend private schools (KHDA, 2015b). In other words, almost nine out of every ten children in Dubai attend private fee charging schools. This unusual scenario warrants individual attention. Before examining the private schooling market in Dubai, I want to clarify my use of the term *schooling*, bearing in mind that it is not within the scope of this study to critically examine schooling or sociological theories of schooling. Although in some contexts 'schooling' has become synonymous with terms such as *education* and *learning*, the majority of academics view them as distinct concepts and disciplines, with some overlaps (Barrett et al., 2006). Schooling in its practical

manifestation in society has been associated with a curriculum of formal, institutionalised instruction of students of similar ages for a period of six to twelve years, with a focus on producing specific outcomes and accompanying credentials (Aronowitz, 2008) such as school leaving certificates. Schools are where the next generation receives instruction and training on particular citizenship expectations alongside social, political, economical and even religious cultural norms. Schools and their perceived roles in society (Chitty, 2002), whether successful or not, agreed upon or not, have attracted attention from governments and policy makers worldwide. Billions of GBP are spent annually across the globe on improving and upgrading school facilities, curricula, resources, teacher training, accountability and educational policies. Schooling is a pillar of all modern societies.

I subscribe to the argument presented by Berlak and Berlak (2012) regarding schooling. They state that the process of being *schooled* is what parents, society and governments depend upon to produce citizens who are able to interact in a highly technological, fast paced, competitive global economy, the success of which is debatable. Nevertheless, 'schooling' in this study is not about the broader meanings of education or learning, but rather the highly organised, curriculum limited experience that children are exposed to in schools (Brint, 2006).

Formalised schooling has not been without its critics, such as Collins (1977), Bourdieu and Johnson (1993) and Gatto (2006). They view it as restrictive, reinforcing social stratification and driven by standardised tests that limit children's potential. Yet standardised testing is one tool used to measure the success of schooling (Fitz-Gibbon C., 1990), and has become a measure of accountability for educational authorities, leading to the publication of school 'league tables' and inspection reports highlighting the results of standardised tests. It is this form of perceived accountability that has allowed schools to be compared nationally, and internationally, such as comparing the performance of students in British Schools Overseas (BSO), like those in Dubai, in relation to schools based in the UK. It is this formal 'accountability' towards schooling that some scholars argue is not a true measure of education or learning. Schools' performances are measured and schools are held accountable for their students' performances in standardised tests. I do not imply that standardised tests are not without their critics and shortcomings, as many

students have been labelled as unsuccessful or underachievers due to their inability to perform as expected in such methods of assessments. Nevertheless, it is this "performance-oriented bureaucracy" (Brint, 2006, p. 10) wherein teachers, leaders and students are expected to attend, meet curricular expectations and conduct standardised tests, that cause me to use *schooling* as the term of reference for this study.

Measures of accountability may or may not contribute to better outcomes for students. Indeed, it may be that an accountability system is in place to suppress individualism, which mitigates the development of true genius through conformity. However, for the purposes of this analysis, I am subscribing to the definition of *schooling* given above – as incomplete as it may be.

1.2.3 Private schooling and accountability

In 1972 the British government and all seven Emirates handed over educational matters to the Federal Ministry of Education. There were 16 boys' schools and 12 girls' schools in Dubai (Heard-Bey, 2004), an increase from just seven schools in 1966. By 2008 Dubai's schooling landscape was very different from that one of 40 years earlier. The current landscape is comprised of both publicly funded schools known as *government* schools and non-subsidised, fee charging schools known as *private* schools, sometimes referred to as *international* schools. This is due to the booming economy, an exponential increase in the number of expatriates and the need for schools offering different curricula to meet students' needs.

I will briefly contextualise the terms *private* and *public* for the UK and the UAE. State schools in the UK are considered public institutions as they are mainly funded by taxpayers and are government owned and monitored. However, schools that are fee charging and relatively independent from the regulations of state funded schools are commonly referred to as *private* or *independent*. Historically they were also known as *public* schools, mainly as they were publicly managed and their enrolment policies did not restrict students' access based upon their location, religion or status (Gillard, 2011). In the UK parents sending their children to fee charging schools do so selectively, as they forgo state schooling in favour of what the private schools may

offer (ISC, 2012). Such is the case in the United States of America (USA), where private schooling is predominantly religious (Belfield and Levin, 2002; CAPE, 2012). This option of selecting private or privatised schooling (I will discuss the difference in the next chapter) over state schooling for religious, political or social reasons is unavailable to expatriates in Dubai. Access to state schooling is a privilege reserved for Emiratis.

Private schools in the Gulf region generally, and Dubai specifically are a relatively new addition to the educational landscape. During the late Nineteenth and early Twentieth centuries, most countries on the Arabian Peninsula were under British colonisation, mainly to safeguard trade routes to and from India and the far East (Cleveland, 2000). And unlike strategic neighbouring Arab countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, the harsh desert climate, few natural resources, a declining population[9] (Gertrude, 1995) and the perceived lack of importance historically, religiously or politically, meant that the British did not invest in developing these colonies. Consequently, no Western schools were established, and the traditional local Islamic schooling was largely unchanged and unchallenged until the discovery of oil in Abu Dhabi in the 1960s. In 1960 the first hospital was established in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, run by missionaries from the USA and Canada. It provided the first non-local, informal schooling for the indigenous Bedouins. It is where they learnt about basic hygiene and health care (Gertrude, 1995). It was also where the missionaries' children were home schooled; this was restricted to the hospital staff, as the Bedouin were Muslims and did not want their children exposed to Christian teachings. As the UAE became more popular with Western workers, private schools were gradually established to for their children, offering their homeland curricula. These schools were privately funded and governed, and were largely independent of state interference. For example, the first British private school in Dubai was established in 1963 by the wives of three European workers. The school's 10 children followed UK school textbooks as their curriculum (Gulf News, 2013b). The growing expatriate population during the 1980s to 2000s, included different nationalities who created a steady and significant demand for private schools that offered different curricula.

[9] This was due to poor health care leading to wide spread disease such as Malaria and Tuberculosis, high numbers of postnatal deaths.

With the increased demand for private schooling, the Ministry of Education (MoE) announced revised Bylaws[10] in 2008 (UAE Ministry of Education, 2008) concerning private schools, as part of stricter regulatory policies. These Bylaws set out guidelines for the establishment and running of private educational institutes, including schools, allowing regional educational authorities to have increased domain over the private schools in their emirates. This change allowed the government of Dubai to incorporate the new Bylaws into a wider and more contextualised framework for improved accountability of private schools.

Public schools remain under the Federal jurisdiction of the MoE and are funded, staffed, monitored and assessed by it. Government schools also adhere strictly to the MoE curriculum and school management is centralised. Private schools, on the other hand, are assessed and monitored differently depending on their Emirate, the wealthier emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have both established education authorities independent of the MoE to monitor, assess and indirectly develop private schools.

Private schools in Dubai are independent of the government in their financial, resource, curriculum and philosophical aspects. Although I agree with Ball (2007, p.15) in his binary distinction between private and public schools, there are cases in which obligations to the government cause the two to intertwine. For example, annual inspections, the inclusion of Arabic and Islamic Education in the curriculum and restrictions on non-Islamic religious celebrations. Such obligations are viewed by Power and Taylor (2013) as problematic in maintaining a strict "public and private opposites" (p.464) approach to defining these schools, as it implies a loss of autonomy. Rather than it being a loss of autonomy, it is a sensible context for the students to better understand and adapt to the culture and norms in the host country. The distinction between private and public schooling in Dubai is not just a matter of finance, resources, curricula and philosophy. It is a matter of access by right of birth. The main distinction is that public government funded education is part of the welfare system gifted exclusively to the Emiratis. Expatriate residents cannot access the public education system, except in rare and unique cases such as pardons by

[10] Such as the UAE Cabinet Decree #29/2008 for Private Education Bylaws

Royal decree for refugee children, or if a child's parent is employed in the MoE and is a fluent Arab speaker, Muslim and he or she is academically a high achiever (Russell and Kleyn, 2013). These criteria leave very few children eligible, and the latter is open for much debated and potential dispute.

Lewin (2014) explores the meaning of private schools in broader terms, focusing on ownership and financial obligations. He argues that there are no clear boundaries between what constitutes "wholly privately owned" (Lewin, 2014, p. 1) schools verses "wholly publicly owned" (Lewin, 2014, p. 1) schools. Lewin states that there are numerous hidden factors that are not always considered when determining if schools are fully public or fully private. For example, a school claiming to enjoy no government support may often employ teachers who were trained using public funds. Therefore there has been a *cross contamination* of financial inputs and thus the private school is no longer fully private or independent. I agree with Lewin (2014) that dividing schools into two camps is not a straightforward task, especially when considering financial cross contamination. But this is not the case in Dubai's private schools. There are very clear distinctions, in this context, between private and public schools. Although there are few aspects of public schooling that Lewin would consider as cross contamination of finances, such as parents purchasing notebooks for their children, this does not bring into question the status of a school being public. Public schools in Dubai are government funded, including buildings, teachers' salaries, textbooks, administrative costs, buses, uniforms, curriculum resources and assessments. Private schools enjoy none of this funding. Although public schools may have other income sources, they remain classified as public. This formal distinction is made in Dubai between the two categories of schools. In this study private schools are those that:

1. Are owned and funded by private investors: these investors range from multi-billion pound international educational firms such as GEMS (GEMS Education, 2014) to small, single family owned schools.
2. Are governed by a board of governors: Dubai Bylaws stipulate that all private schools must have a board of governors;
3. Select their own curricula: Schools offer either a single curriculum, such as the IB or, a combination of two, such as the UK and the IB;
4. Are autonomous in staff appointments;

5. Externally affiliated or accredited by independent organizations such as the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) or the International Baccalaureate Organization (IBO) Authorization.

According to statistics released by the KHDA 225,099 students registered in private schools in Dubai (88.7 per cent of the total student population) in 2012/2013, compared to 99,367 students in 2001/2002 (KHDA, 2013d). Chart 1 below demonstrates the steady increase in students since 2001/2002:

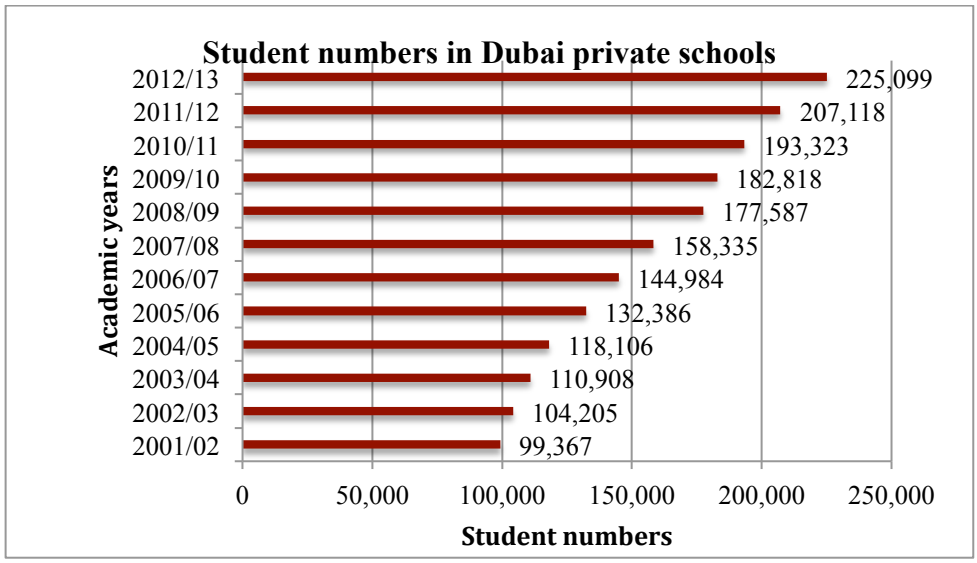

Chart 1: Students in private schools in Dubai from 2001/2002 through to 2012/2013 (KHDA, 2013d, p.5)

During the academic year 2012/2013 there were 143 private schools operating in Dubai, of which 53 were UK curriculum schools, 24 were Indian, 35 were US, 13 were MoE, seven were IB, six were Iranian, four French, three were Pakistani, two were Filipino, and one Lebanese school offered a SABIS curriculum, with external UK exams. The student demographics of these schools varied considerably, as there were over 117 nationalities. Chart 3 shows that the largest proportion of students by nationality were the Indian students, at 35.2 per cent. The UAE nationals were second at 13.4 per cent; whilst Pakistanis were at 9.6 per cent and British children only 4.9 per cent. There were also only 2.4 per cent US students in the schools (KHDA, 2013b). Interestingly, the largest annual growth for student enrolments for the academic year 2012/2013 were in the schools that offered an Indian curriculum, at a rate of 10 per cent. This was followed by the UK curriculum schools at 8.9 per cent and then US curriculum schools at 7.5 per cent, with the private MoE curriculum schools growing at only 1.1 per cent annually (KHDA, 2013b, p 10). This

indicates that the Indian student population is by far the largest and growing faster than all other nationalities, whilst the UK curriculum is the most popular. For these reasons, I will choose to focus this study on the four main curricula on offer in Dubai, namely, the Indian, UK, US, and MoE curricula.

These numbers reveal a noteworthy feature of Dubai's schools: the curriculum offered at a school does not necessarily reflect the student enrolled in it. Although national curriculum schools are popular with the citizens of a country, particular curriculum schools attract large proportions of international students. These schools are referred to as *international schools*. For example, Chart 2 shows the percentage of students studying each curriculum, and Chart 3 the nationalities of students in the private schools. These show that almost a third (70,860) of the students in Dubai attend one of the 53 UK curriculum schools. However, less than 5 per cent of the private school student population schools are British nationals. Similarly, only 2.4 per cent of students are US citizens, yet the US curriculum schools had 21.2 per cent of the private school student body.

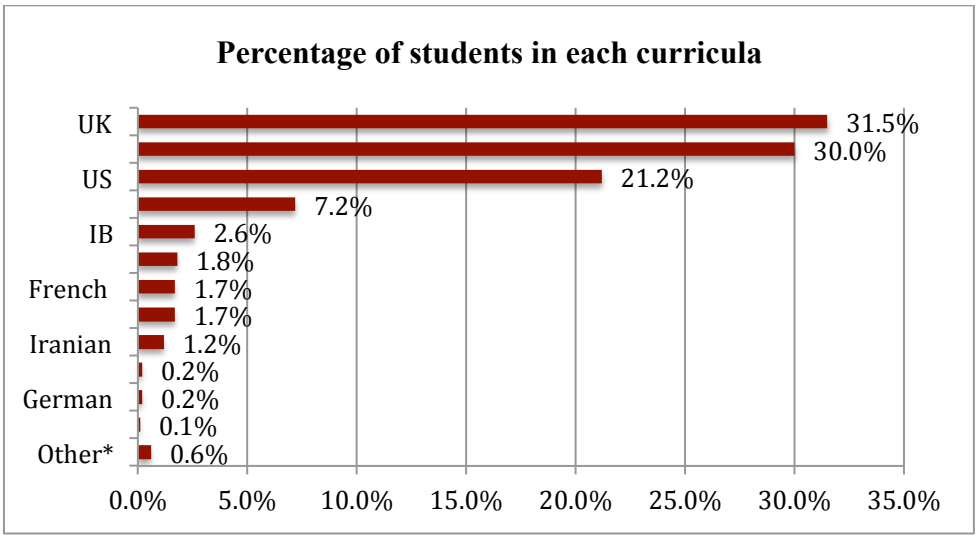

Chart 2: Percentage of students studying each curriculum in Dubai's private schools 2012/2013 (KHDA, 2013c)

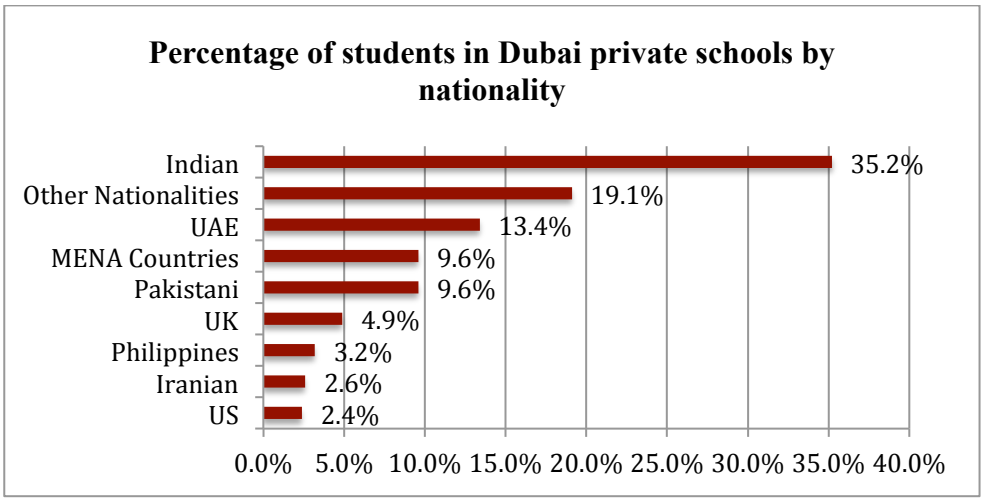

Chart 3: The percentages of students in private schools in Dubai by nationality 2012/2013 (KHDA, 2013c)

The private schools that have an international student body or teach a non-UAE curriculum are commonly referred to as *the international schools.* This informal reference by either the media (ISCG, 2014) or parents has become synonymous with the term *private schools,* and the distinction between private and international has become blurred. Defining international schools remains problematic and is open to much interpretation in the literature. As pointed out by Drake (2011), academics are yet to agree on a definition of international schools, as their beliefs about the purpose, philosophy and composition of international schools vary considerably. There are academics who attempted to tackle this problem by categorising international schools, in different contexts, by common features (Leach, 1969; Sanderson, 1981; Ponisch, 1987; Bartlett, 1992; Hayden and Thompson, 1995 and Hayden, 2006). In this study I chose to refer to these schools as *private* rather than *international*; firstly, to avoid the ambiguity surrounding what comprises an international school, as it is not within the scope of this study to explain; and secondly, schools that are fee charging have the common feature of being market driven. I also will revisit the concept of *privatisation* as addressed in the literature, and within the context of this research.

Matthews (1988) presented two domains within which international schools operate: market driven and ideologically driven. Although this division was contested by Hill (1994) and Hayden and Thompson (1995), it is fair to state that ideologically driven or not, schools that operate solely on fees revenues cannot but be affected by the market conditions, even if they are non-profit schools. MacDonald (2006), examined

international schools through an economic lens, and argued "international schools exist within an economic context and are exposed to market forces, competitive strategies will be naturally employed … even if many educators hesitate to borrow such language from the world of business" (p. 208). So, *could the business of private schooling in Dubai be described as a 'market'?* Most debates in the literature regarding education markets tend to focus on educational systems that are undergoing what Tooley (2000) describes as "choice reform" (Tooley, 2000, p. 11). This reform involves parents having choices of schooling for their children, whereby *choice* is "introduced into a heavily regulated, state funded and provided system" (Ibid, p. 12). Tooley (2000) argues that the ways these education systems are described and critiqued as *markets in education* are invalid, as they do not behave as a market. He listed five essential features for the term *market* to be applied. Below are the five features of a market as described by Tooley (2000) and their applicability to the context of private schooling in Dubai:

1. *No state provision*: private schools are self-providing, including the land that schools are built on, as they are either gifted or rented. Non-UAE citizens cannot purchase Emirati land.
2. *No state funding*: All private schools must operate financially independent of any state funding. Therefore, private schools are fee charging, and only a few charity schools are financially subsidized by Islamic tithing[11] or through private donations but never government funds.
3. *Relatively minimal regulation*: The regulation of private schools in Dubai is relatively independent of the federal MoE and is under the jurisdiction of the KHDA. Private school regulations are mainly start up regulations and approvals, such as those concerning labour laws and school permits (KHDA, 2014d). As of 2008 annual inspections have been done by the DSIB. These are not uncommon regulations that would apply to most any other business.
4. *Relatively easy entry for new suppliers*: This is what MacDonald calls "barriers to entry" (2006, p.208) in which new schools may face a range of factors that make it difficult for them to enter the school market and position themselves amongst established or dominant school owners. In order to

[11] Zakat: is the religious payment made annually under Islamic Law.

further develop its commercial infrastructure and meet the growing demand for school places, the KHDA encourages investors to set up private schools. In the last five years there has been a huge increase in the number of schools, with both new and returning investors (KHDA, 2013d). There are currently over 65 private investors in Dubai, with some owning and managing one school, others over 30 schools.

5. *A price mechanism*: All private schools are fee charging, including the few charity schools that charge nominal fees. Fees charged by schools and published by the KHDA do not always reflect the total costs of schooling. They often only include tuition, omitting transportation, books, uniforms, extra-curricula activity costs, extending the pricing mechanism of schools.

Applying these five features to the private schooling sector in Dubai implies that this system would appear to qualify as *a market*. Thus, Dubai is 'setting out its stall' on schooling to the expatriate parent, viewing schooling as a commodity rather than a public good. Consequently, the buying of schooling becomes a private matter of *choice of priorities* to the parents. As in any market, this choice is now dependent upon factors such as the parents' curriculum preference, market norms (Aspin, Chapman and Wilkinson, 1994), location and costs. Another meaning of market, more commonly used in Britain, is the 'Thatcherite' concept of 'competition in education' (Chitty, 2002; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011). Parents choosing which state school they will send their children to being based upon many factors linked to outcomes. Their choice of a particular school attracts the funds to that school. The more students a school has, the more money it gets.

There has been a steady rise in the number of schools and expansion of existing schools to accommodate more students. Yet the landscape of private schools in Dubai can be characterized as 'shifting sands' since schools open, grow or close relatively quickly. For example, the number of private schools in Dubai increased from 143 in 2008 to 169 in 2015 (KHDA, 2015a, 2015b), and during these seven years, nine schools have closed. In 2013 the KHDA estimated there were 221,000 students in private schools. The KHDA estimates that the private education market has an annual gross revenue from fees alone of AED 4.1 billion (about 722 million

GBP), an increase of 16.3 per cent in one year (KHDA, 2013d). The fees vary between schools (KHDA, 2013d, p17) and tend to increase by year group. The private schools are mainly for profit, but 16 operate not for profit. Only 17 per cent of the students attend the non-profit schools (KHDA, 2013d, p15).

With an expanding, market driven private schooling sector comes the challenge of regulating and monitoring the quality of provision and outcomes. Therefore, in 2007, the DSIB was established with a mandate to determine the quality of schooling in all schools in Dubai. The inspectorate, with the assistance of the Council for British Teaching Educational Trust (CfBT), created an inspection framework that used six Key Questions (KQ), with 16 subsequent quality indicators to evaluate schools. These indicators were judged using *outstanding, good, acceptable* or *unsatisfactory* as ordinal categories. School inspections in Dubai follow an annual cycle, meaning that every school is inspected yearly, and almost all[12] schools in Dubai have had an annual inspection since the academic year 2008/2009. The DSIB publishes all schools' inspection reports each May. I used the inspection judgements (and the other inspection publications) to examine the relationship between the school quality and the fees charged by them.

1.3 Main research hypothesis and questions

The main objective of this research was to examine the extent to which students of lower socio-economic status had access to *good* or *outstanding* quality of schooling within the private fee-charging sector.

The main hypothesis: *in the absence of government funded schooling, students who attend higher fee charging private schools are more likely to receive better quality schooling than those who attend lower fee charging schools.* The subsidiary questions:

1. *How do different factors affect the odds of students receiving good or outstanding quality schooling?*
2. *What is the KHDA's perception of fees in relation to inspection findings?*

[12] The use of 'almost all' here is because some schools were not in operation in 2008, and were inspected in their second year of operation.

3. *To what extent does the definition of quality as outlined in the Inspection Framework affect different curricula schools attaining good or outstanding schooling?*

Testing this hypothesis will focus on the four most demanded curricula, in schools where the largest proportion of students are enrolled, and examining the relationship between their quality and costs.

1.4 Summary

This Chapter attempts to set the scene for my research project, as follows:
A very small minority of Dubai's population are UAE citizens who are entitled to the benefits of its aspirational education system; those who are non-citizens are excluded. Although Dubai depends almost entirely on their economic contributions, it does not contribute to their education by substantial means. The government attempts to quality assure the schools' provision and outcomes through annual inspections. Visitors in the country are left to make their own arrangements for their children's education, for which they pay differing amounts. This arrangement creates a market wherein competition is fierce.

In the next chapter I will examine relevant literature on privatization, notions of quality schooling and the socio-economic status (SES) of students. I will set out my working definitions and parameters for these terms. I will also examine the inspection system in Dubai as a means for measuring the quality of schooling.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will examine the relevant literature on private schools in the context of privatisation and the notions of quality in society. Thereafter I will explore the perceptions of quality in schooling by reviewing notions of quality indicators, as defined by governments for the purpose of school inspections, particularly in Dubai. I will also examine the relevant literature on the socio-economic status (SES) of students and school quality.

2.2 Schooling in Dubai: privatisation, private schooling and choice

This study aims to set the context of private schooling in socio-economic terms and examine the intertwining of the notion of *school quality* (as defined by inspection outcomes) and the socio-economic status of students (as indicated by their school fees) in contributing to potentially widening the gap of access to higher quality schooling between those who can afford the higher school fees, and those who cannot. In order to do so a review of the literature is necessary. However, there is a lack of in-depth research in the field of the market provided approach to private schooling, not to say that the literature is silent about this, rather that the focus appears to be on privatisation and marketisation as a process public schools undergo. My aim is to examine the how the literature defines the concept of private schools from different perspectives. In Chapter One, I discussed private schooling in relation to international schooling and the market: I will now examine private schooling as defined by the socio-economic groups it serves, then in light of privatisation. I will demonstrate that private schooling in Dubai, and the surrounding GCC countries, does not conform to the common definitions of privatisation.

2.2.1 Private schools as defined by the SES it serves

Examining the literature regarding parents who choose private schooling over public, as defined by their SES, highlight two main groups:

a. *Private schools for those of a low SES*: There is a notable increase of private schools in low-income countries in Africa, India and Asia over the past few decades (Tooley and Dixon, 2003, 2006; Tooley 2009; 2010; ICEF Monitor, 2014). These schools are mainly funded by Non-Government Organisations (NGOs), charity establishments or for-profit educational institutes and are mainly operational to provide alternative, and some may argue better, schooling for the poorer of society (Tooley, 1999).

   The literature is divided on the effectiveness, purpose, success and need for such private schools when government schooling is provided (Klees, 2008), albeit there is a general consensus about the poor quality of the government schools. Consequently, those of the lower SES enrol their children in low-fee private schools in the hope of a better education. This is what is referred to as "differentiated demand" (Lewin, 2014, p. 7). Yet setting expectations for the poorer of society to pay for the right of basic schooling has been one of the main objections to this kind of private schooling, and is an argument that Lewin (2014) rejects, as he believes that access to public schooling is still an option for these children, but one that is not exercised by their parents. Lewin (2014) argues that although opportunities for schooling are provided by the existence of low-fee private schools, they do not serve the poorest of the poor in such societies, as they struggle to pay the fees and, in some cases, are not able to, therefore defeating the purpose. Nonetheless, private schooling is still optional for these parents and they exercise their choice of schooling.

b. *Private schools for those of a high SES*; this would include mainly three groups:

   - The wealthier or more privileged of society (Benavot et al., 2015) where private schools are seen to serve the needs of elites (Walford, 2005) and where "private schools constitute the very reassuring golden ticket to a successful degree and

career, positioning their graduates conveniently close to the door of the Oxbridge admission office" (Carpan, 2013), or in other words, the priviliged universities.

- The middle class parents seeking an elite education for their children: this is an emerging phenomenon in China where, according to Wu (2008), "the current pracitce of parental choice … is charaterized by the introduction of a variety of market mechanisms, which demonstrates, on the one hand, the attempt made by the middle class to gain advantage in the positional competition in eduation; and on the other hand, the accommodation of the Chinese government … in particular, to the needs/desires of the middle class." (p. 596)

- Parents seeking specialist schooling for their children and are financially able to do so. In other words, parents who seek an education for their children in an area that is not appropriately or sufficiently addressed in public schools, such as sports or musical education (Brighouse and Swift, 2009). This category of private schools would also include parents of a professional or managerial SES who can afford the finances of private schooling (Yang and Kayaardi, 2004; Goldring and Phillips, 2008). This notion of student segregation by their socio-economic background was also reported by Valenzuela, Bellei and Ríos (2013) in Chile, where students of high SES were most likely those who attended non-subsidised private schools while those of a lower SES tended to be those attending public schools.

Unlike most of the schools in (a), private schools in (b) frequently operate independent of government funding, and in most cases outside of the UK, these schools tend to offer an alternative to the national curriculum of the country within which they operate.

Not all view private schooling by the rich as a positive educational experience, for example Brunello and Rocco (2008) used the scandal of selling high school diplomas in some private schools in Italy as an example to illustrate that private schools create a culture of providing other desirable services to their customers, that are not necessarily good schooling. They argue that some private schools offer a service of leisure and not quality (Brunello and Rocco, 2008, p.1866). The notion that private schools offer "a positive price for leisure" (Brunello and Rocco, 2008, p.1867) is one that cannot be neglected, and the chances of this taking place in Dubai is possible, however, with no literature or evidence to support it, it can only be an assumption based largely on anecdotal evidence and prejudices.

Notwithstanding, in both SES groups parents have forgone public schooling for private, scenarios that are not uncommon in the literature. However, the literature does not sufficiently address the notion of *choice* within exclusively private schooling setting, and one that may be suggested is ideal for the neoliberal advocates of minimal, or even no government involvement in schooling, such as Giroux (2010) and Madrick (2011), who favour the private sector organising and administering schools.

2.2.2 Private schools as defined by the notion of privatisation

The concept of *privatisation* according to Belfield and Levin (2002) is defined as "the transfer of activities, assets and responsibilities from government/public institutions and organisations to private individuals and agencies" (p.19). This definition implies a decreasing role of the public entity in response to a *takeover* by a private one. Ball and Youdell (2007) reflect this definition in some aspects of their approach to defining privatisation, as they establish two privatisation groupings: "Privatisation in Public Education or 'endogenous' privatisation" (Ball and Youdell, 2007, p.13) and "Privatisation of Public Education or 'exogenous' privatisation" (Ball and Youdell, 2007, p.13). Both types of privatisation are primarily concerned with public entities, but they differ in considering how each entity *behaves*. The former is concerned with public schools behaving more like businesses, by introducing that which makes private business successful into the public schools. This is not merely a transfer or exchange of current activities between a public

school and a private entity, as is suggested by Belfield and Levin (2002) in order to enhance or improve it, but rather it suggests a change of activities as part of a paradigm shift within a public school, mainly without the input of a private entity. This form of privatisation can be applied to government schools that act as a business; no such arrangements are in place in the public schooling sector in Dubai.

Exogenous privatisation, however, is mostly reflective of Belfield and Levin's (2002) definition of privatisation, but extends it further. Ball and Youdell (2007) describe this privatisation as a full or partial involvement of a private entity (or entities) in the running of a public one. In other words, private for-profit entities are welcomed into public schools with the expectation that they will take full or partial responsibility for the services, management and improvement of the school. It is in such cases that the boundaries between private and public become blurred and public-private schools become more complex to define. Privatisation in such cases tends to categorise these schools are private, as alluded to by the term.

In an attempt to avoid such blurred lines, Hentschke and Brewer (2010) adopt a different approach to a similar concept. In addition to their clear distinction between models of private and public schools they introduce a third "hybrid" (p.374) model: *independent schools*, which is very similar to Ball and Youdell's (2007) exogenous description of privatisation. Independent schools are public government funded schools operated privately, and otherwise referred to as charter schools or contract schools. Essentially the same, this kind of privatisation referred to by Ball and Youdell (2007) and Hentschke and Brewer (2010) do exist in some GCC countries although not in Dubai. Two examples in the GCC of such private schooling may be found in the Independent Schools in Qatar and the Public Private Partnership (PPP) in Abu Dhabi, UAE. Starting in 2002 Qatar initiated a process of privatising its publically funded schools as part of a reform that aimed towards resolving problems in the state-funded schools. Such problems, as outlined in the RAND Corporation Report (Zellman, Constant, and Goldman, 2011), addressed core issues in the government schools that were historical and repetitive in nature, leading to poor quality provision and outcomes. These included poor quality curriculum, poor teaching and assessment strategies, lack of student motivation and a need for more accurate accountability. However, as is the case with the neighbouring GCC

countries, such schools were primarily for the indigenous population, thus limiting the expatriate community to pursuing schooling for their children in the private fee paying schools. Similarly, from 2006 to 2012 The Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) administered the Private-Public Partnership (PPP) Project, in which most of the public state funded schools were privately run by a range of international educational consultancies with the aim of improving provision and outcomes.

Notably, such reforms were exclusive to the public schooling sector, as part of a drive to be, what is described by Wiseman (2010) as, a "global educational community" (p.22). In other words, public schools in the GCC have undergone various reforms in the last 15 years in an attempt to improve their provision and outcomes whilst maintaining their Arabic-Islamic identity, culture and heritage. They attempt to align their public schooling system with that of better achieving international counterparts, in order to be part of an international community of countries that "share common educational expectations, experiences, success and failures" (Wiseman, 2010, p.23). Examining the success and challenges of these reforms and the public private partnerships in the region are not within the scope of this study. Suffice to say that the rationale, role, and infrastructure of such partnerships have led to varying outcomes and are often the focus of educational reform forums, symposiums and publications regarding privatisation in the region (Hodge, Greve and Boardman, 2010; Rudy, 2011; Ibrahim, 2013).

The private schooling sector in Dubai conforms to neither of these definitions of privatisation, as they are not public funded schools that have been privatised nor are they public schools that act as a business: they are independent of the government.

Another position regarding privatisation is presented by Bellei and Orellana (2014). The core of their argument is the distinction made between "internal privatisation of public education and open privatisation of education" (Bellei and Orellana, 2014, p.7), with the former echoing the definition of exogenous privatisation by Ball and Youdell (2007). Examining the privatisation of public education or schools is not within the scope of this study. However, I will further examine the concept of *open privatisation of education* or in this case schooling, as it is more concerned with private schools, more specifically the expansion of private schools by increasing the

number of students who enrol in these schools in contrast to the public schools. Such forms of privatisation within the private school sector are a growing trend (Ball 2007, Ball and Youdell 2007, Bellei and Orellana 2014), and are mainly to provide more schooling opportunities, and some cases better schooling opportunities. Again, the private school sector in Dubai does not conform to this form of privatisation, as the dimensions of this type of privatisation as set out by Bellei and Orellana (2014) are not practiced in Dubai as private schools are not allocated public resources, neither are there public requirements for private schools as part of an exchange for public resources, such as tax exemption or any forms of subsidies (Bellei and Orellana, 2014, p.18).

In addition to the private schools in Dubai not conforming to the notions of privatisation of public schools, as is presented above, they also do not conform to the wider meanings of privatisation of private schools discussed. They are not public schools that have been partially or fully privatised, nor are they behaving as a private business, they also are not private schools that obtain support from the government in terms of either finances or resources. They are stand-alone private businesses that are mostly for-profit.

Finally, Tooley (2003) defines *privatisation of education* in light of three levels, or as he describes it "a three-dimensional space, with the three axes being regulation, funding and provision of education" (p.428). In other words, Tooley (2003) is describing a spectrum of privatisation, ranging from the public schools with no private intervention to the "private alternative" (p.428). This spectrum suggests that schools with different degrees of privatisation, depending on the axes, will be closer or further away from the *private alternative* and thus providing a range of degrees of privatisation. He also states, "no country has a fully privatised its education system" (Tooley, 2003, p. 428). However, the notion of a *private alternative*, referred to by Tooley, in light of the absences of public schooling for expatriates, as is the case in Dubai and most GCC countries, holds no meaning and is not applicable. In the UAE, a country with one of the highest number of students attending international (ISCG, 2014) or private schools, the *alternative private education* can only be related to the indigenous students. Bearing that in mind, it is therefore safe to say that within the

sphere of private schools for expatriates one can find Tooley's non-existent fully privatised education system.

The descriptions of *privatisation* examined do not apply to the context of private schools in Dubai and the attempts at doing so erroneously place private schools on par with public privatised schools, leading to assumptions and premises being made that may not accurately reflect the definition and context of private schools in Dubai. For example, Dubai's private schools, despite wishing to appear so, do not replicate what constitutes a private school in the western world. In other words, they are not necessarily defined by their academic success in sending students on to top universities. Indeed, for expatriates, they are not even defined by the concept of offering a privileged or elite education as a substitution for public schooling. Their basic premise of differentiation is predicated on the simple philosophy of affordability. Another example is misplaced inclusion of private schools in reference to the privatisation of education, such as references made in the Gulf Comparative Education Society Symposium of 2011 (GCES , 2011). This is significant because privatisation suggests a process of becoming private whereas private schools can exist on their own merits without undergoing any privatisation process. In this respect there is a dearth of literature pertaining to the private schools that are intrinsically and comprehensibly private, and more specifically in the GCC.

Now I turn to the demographics of Dubai and what is known about the socio-economic status (SES) of students in the private schools.

2.2.3 School fees: Indicators of SES and a financial reality

There have been different interpretations in the literature as to what exactly SES represents and their different paradigms. Not surprisingly there remains no full agreement in the literature amongst social scientists on what these should include or dismiss (Sirin, 2005; Bornstein and Bradley, 2012; Bouhlila, 2013, 2015). This is largely due to the social currencies valued in each context within which the studies take place. Santrock (2004), for example, defines SES as "the grouping of people with similar occupational, educational, and economic characteristics" (p.589) whereas Woolfolk (2007) calls SES "the relative standing in society based on

income, power, background and prestige" (p.165). Baker, Goesling and LeTendre (2002) and others focused on family class, as defined by the culture within which their study was conducted, mainly because they determined that each culture had its own class structures, a point acknowledged by many researchers. In addition to the above, indicators of SES have been outlined by independent, international research associations such as the indicators used in The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) or Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). These have been determined to include, for example, the level of a father's or mother's education and number of books in the home. There are also aggregated SES measures, such as a neighbourhood's SES, i.e. where the child lives (Brooks-Gunn, Duncan and Aber, 1997) or a school's SES, rather than individual student's SES, but these have not been without their concerns regarding interpretation of results, more specifically concerns around ecological and exception fallacies. While there are disagreements in the literature on the definition of SES, there is a general consensus of the "tripartite nature of SES that incorporates parental income, parental education, and parental occupation as the three main indicators of SES" (Sirin, 2005, p. 418). While these tripartite indicators of SES are recognised, nevertheless, I would like to take this further and say that ability to pay fees, or affordability, emerges as the decisive factor in the absence of public schooling. I will expand below.

Research into affordability of school fees is largely conducted in settings where private schooling is a choice. For example, Morrow and Wilson (2014) conducted a study in Andhra Pradesh, India, where the vast majority of parents send their children to low fee private schools. They perceive that this would improve their children's futures. Morrow and Wilson (2014) concluded that:

1. There are very differing perspectives by parents on what constitutes quality schooling;
2. It is only those with more disposable income who can afford the low-fee private schools, thus the "poorest of the poor" (2014, p. 22) have no option but public schooling although it was not uncommon for them to take out high loans to pay for the private schooling;

3. Parents typically select private schooling, not always because of the perceived better quality, but because of the accountability, as they are paying for a service and thus their opinions should be heard.

Morrow and Wilson's (2014) study shows that even the poorest parents would take out loans to provide their children with what they perceived to be the best quality of schooling, they are buying the best they could afford for their children. Taking out bank loans to cover school loans is not uncommon. Key banks in the UAE, such as HSBC, Emirates NBD, Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank (ADCB) and National Bank of Abu Dhabi (NBAD), to name a few, all have special loan plans including credit cards specifically issued for school fee loans, that in partnership with some private educational establishments such as GEMS and Aldar Academies, provide discounts and opportunities to win back up to half of the fees (Abu Dhabi Week, 2015).

Similarly, a study conducted by the KHDA on the reasons behind Emirati parents' forgoing public schools for fee charging private schools, found that parents wanted "the best education for their children" (KHDA, 2012c, p. 28) and this better education, as per parents' belief, was to be found in the private schools. It is almost as if parents assume that if a service is paid for, then it is likely to be a better one than a service that is free of charge. In other words, market forces are seen as improving a service since competition dictates pace. The idea of linking market forces to international schools (referred to in this study as private schools) is not a new one. Blaney (2000) states that "international schools are fee-based and tuition driven with respect to the funding of their operations" (p. 160) indicating that markets forces could be applied to fee-charging schools, thus providing an economic context to these schools.

In a system where free schooling is not accessible to the larger proportion of residents, and parents pay fees for their children's schooling, it is a fair assumption that fees would be a major consideration when selecting a school. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I will be work from the premise of *affordability*, assuming that expatriate parents in Dubai, like most parents, have high aspirations for their children and will pay for the best schooling they can afford. As in India, it is

assumed that even the poorest parents in Dubai "will make financial sacrifices in the hope that their children will have a better life … than their own" (Morrow & Wilson, 2014, p. 20), and secure a better future for themselves, and thus choose the best quality their money can buy. Consequently, the fee range of a school will infer the SES of its students and their parents. The affordability of a school is important, but I do not claim that there is a direct correlation between school fees and a student's SES, but rather use fees as an objective indicator for the purposes of this study.

Accepting the premise that affordability is an indicator of SES is not uncommon in Dubai or the GCC region, as it is a strong hint towards household income. According to Davidson (2005, 2008 and 2011) and Haines (2011) Dubai is a global city, which has proven successful in branding itself as a place selling "… a particular global dream of high-class consumption and luxurious lifestyles." (p.161). They argue that Dubai has been successful in doing so by selling not just a dream-image but by "…attracting all levels of workers, from construction labourers to middle-class professionals and the multitude of service workers (domestic servants, drivers, sales and clerks, etc.) to cater to their needs." (Haines, 2011, p.165). According to the latest official data (Rasheed, 2009; DSC, 2009), less than 15 per cent of Dubai's population is comprised of UAE nationals, with approximately 85 per cent of the expatriate population comprised of mainly Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Western expatriates, as shown in Chart 3.

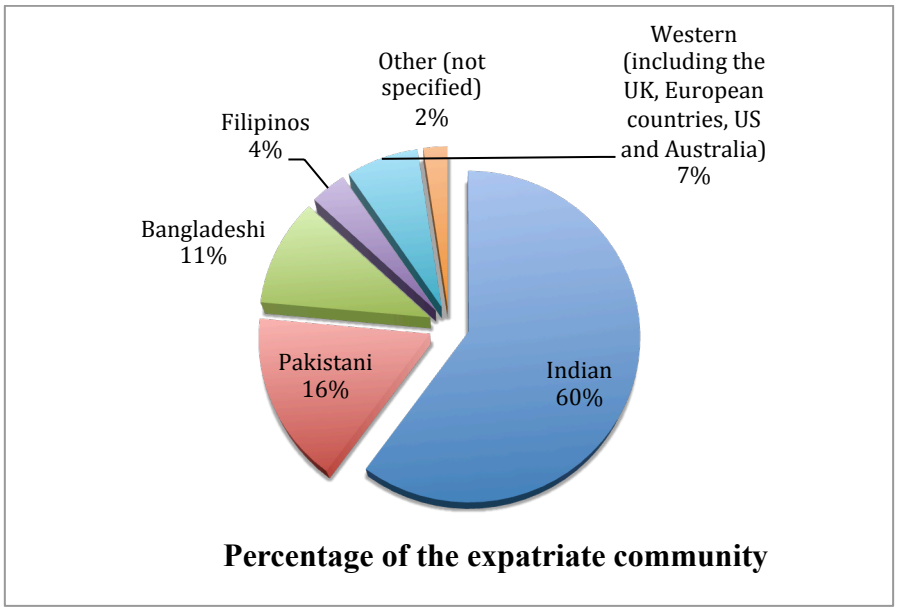

Chart 3: Percentage of expatriates by nationality in Dubai (DSC, 2009)

Dubai's expatriates experience a social stratification that many academics and MENA social scientists agree is based on nationality and ethnicity (Acuto, 2010; Davidson, 2005, 2008, 2011, 2012; Elsheshtawy, 2008; Haines, 2011; Walsh, 2011), something that is frowned upon in the West. This divide, according to Walsh (2011), is one that determines job opportunities, income, place in society and how each social class is percieved by others. Although presented from different perspectives, Elsheshtawy (2008), Davidson (2005, 2008, 2011, 2012) and Hanies (2011) all state that employment opportunities and salary scales are often racially stratified. For example, salaries of Western teachers can reach up to ten times the salary of Filipino or Indian teachers (Dubaifaqs, 2013; Malek, 2013).

In a HAYS recent salary scale for the UAE, it is noticeable that salary scales per working grade or role are often very broad and wide when compared to international scales (HAYS, 2014). Presumably this allows for the kind of stratification that scholars claim exist. In 2008, one fifth of the labour force in Dubai was illiterate and primarily from India, Pakistan or Bangladesh (Tong, 2010). They were mainly construction workers and unskilled labourers whose median salary was around AED 14,000 (about GBP 2,250) *annually*. Such low-range salaries are not uncommon for classroom assistants in some of the low fee schools, such as the Iranian or Indian ones. The vast majority of the educated labour force are low-skilled service workers, construction workers and clerks whose salaries are around AED 24,000 (GBP 3,870) a year. "Western and Emirati workers are paid way above the national average … followed by GCC nationals … and non-GCC Arab workers. Asian workers are paid the least and work the longest hours" (Tong, 2010, p.11). Western expatriates are among the highest paid in Dubai, as consultants, executives, pilots, lawyers and other highly skilled jobs, yet they only represent a small slice of society (refer Chart 3). Indeed, the very language used promotes a form of racial profiling where the *expatriates* are invariably White Westerners and the rest are given a specific nationality reference, e.g. Indian, Pakistani, Lebanese, etc. According to the Dubai Economic Council, the poverty line in the UAE in 2011 was estimated at AED 80 (GBP 12.90) a day, higher than the international poverty line outlined by the World Bank as AED 4.6 (GBP .70) a day (The World Bank, 2012). Yet many of the workers are obliged to pay back visa costs, accommodation and utility allowances, that may total more than their income, leaving them below the poverty line.

The affordability of private schooling is a concern to parents in the GCC. A study conducted by Booz & Company on the expansion of private schools in the GCC, states that private schools face the challenge of having to "serve customer bases with varying income levels and curriculum preferences." (Moujaes, Hoteit, & Hiltunen, 2011, p. 6). The challenge for parents would be to find the best schooling they can buy for their children and ideally do so debt free. However, it is widely recognised that the cost of private schooling in the GCC generally, and Dubai more specifically, is one of the highest globally (Thacker and Cuadra, 2014). The fees of schools vary extensively and would start at around GBP 1,000 a year for Kindergarten in the lower end of the scale and reach to around GBP 8,500 a year for Kindergarten in a higher end school. In almost all schools in Dubai tuition fees generally increase by grade level, a practice that is common among many private schools globally, however in most non-profit school the increases for tuition fees are per phase of school and not per grade. Such fees are solely tuition fees and parents pay additional costs of administration fees, text books, uniforms, transportation, activities, clubs, school trips, to name a few (Nazzal, 2013). These extra non-negotiable fees ranged from 17 per cent of the tuition costs up to 58 per cent in some schools.

The high cost of private schooling, combined with the additional fees for books, uniforms, transportation and other hidden costs has meant that the number of parents taking out educational loans in Dubai is on the rise (Ahmed, 2012a) and families are attempting to save money in order to pay for their children's schooling (Everington, 2014). The ideal of a debt free education is a privilege only a few can afford. The local media in the UAE is actively voicing the general rise of frustration amongst parents regarding the affordability of schooling, especially if schooling more than one child (Ahmed, 2012a; Qandeel, 2014), which is often the case, with some families schooling up to thirteen children and others selecting which of their children (often the male children) to send to more expensive schools, which are often perceived as better, and which (often the female children) to send to less expensive schools.

In 2012 the KHDA published the *School Fees Framework* (KHDA, 2012d), with the objective of regulating school fees "to protect the students and their parents as beneficiaries of educational services" (KHDA, 2012d, p.1) and to encourage

investors "to improve the quality of education" (KHDA, 2012d, p. 1). Since 2009 the KHDA has enforced a fee hike policy, in which fee hikes are linked to the overall (KQ7) school inspection outcomes (Sankar, 2009; KHDA, 2012d; Pennington, 2015). The fees framework calculates the eligible fee increase schools may apply for, depending on their inspection result, by referring to an Educational Cost Index (ECI), the value of which is set by the Dubai Statistics Center (DSC)[13]. The variables that define the ECI are not known, which raises questions about the alleged transparency of the workings of the process. Nonetheless, in the same document the KHDA clearly determines the standards of quality accepted, "KHDA sees 'Good' as a minimum acceptable standard for private schools in the Emirate" (KHDA, 2012d, p. 4), and therefore only the schools with an overall rating of *good* or *outstanding* may benefit from fee hikes. It is for this reason that in this study I will consider better quality schooling to be determined by inspection results that are *good* or *outstanding* and poorer quality will be results that are *unsatisfactory* or *acceptable*.

2.3 Notions of quality in society

For centuries notions of quality have varied and have been the focus of many debates. Although everyone seeks *quality* (Aspin, Chapman and Wilkinson, 1994), or rather what they subjectively perceive quality to be, there is a consensus in the literature that attempting to define quality is, and most likely will remain, an ongoing debate. This is mainly because the challenge of agreeing on what form quality should take is difficult to determine, perhaps even impossible (Aspin, Chapman and Wilkinson, 1994; Mok and Armstrong, 1998; Reddy, 2007).

The ancient Greeks appear to be the first to significantly contribute to discussions about quality. In their pursuit of *excellence* or *arête* in all aspects of their lives, they attempted to describe the *ideal*. It was Plato who viewed this *excellence* as an absolute and it became, to him, the standard defining and describing quality as it was "the good, the highest form, the highest idea of all" (Pirsig, 1974, cited by Reeves and Bender, 1994, p.420). Plato's notions of *the ideal* are also well discussed in Pirsig's landmark book on quality, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (1974) as he presents examples of how the ancient Greeks pursued their notion of the

[13] Refer to Appendix 1 for the fee framework.

ideal good in different aspects of their lives. However, the applications of this idealistic perception of quality were always dependent upon the subject and the context, as discussed by Kitto (1951), and cited in Reeves and Bender (1994). Yet, this notion of quality being defined as *excellence* lacks objectivity. This is because features of excellence, as perceived by its advocates, remain abstract and undefined. They are conditional, according only to semi-collective or individual beliefs, values, agenda and ideals (Moss, 1994). They may or may not be shared with others. New interpretations of excellence, or quality, are coined, leading to little or no agreement on a single definition.

Today, the term *quality* is rarely solely associated with excellence; it takes on more complex and varied considerations. It was Juran and Gryna (1988) who first expanded on the notion of quality as meaning both a *notion of excellence* and *conformity to a set of specifications*, i.e., manufacturer's product specifications. This notion of quality was debated in the context of industry and markets, especially since the start of mass production and wider global trading in the 19th century (Reeves & Bendar, 1994). Additionally, as consumers were presented with more choices in a competitive market, it became apparent that their beliefs about quality were increasingly important. This new reality was mirrored in the debates concerning the definitions of quality in the literature. Critics started to take into consideration the consumer; that is, their satisfaction, needs and expectations (Grönroos, 1990; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry, 1990). Consequently, during the rise of the service industries from the 1960s to the 1980s, the debates in the literature shifted from discussions about products to services, this is found in the work of Judd (1968), Levitt (1972), Lovelock (1981) and, Williams and Zigli (1987). This was not unexpected, as the discussions about quality were dominated by manufacturer's product specifications and mostly neglected the consumer. The apparent focus on quality being associated with product specifications alone was inapplicable to the increasingly important service industries. Defining quality in terms of services proved to be even more challenging, as customers held their own notions of quality. This, of course, was not a collectively agreed notion, as potentially each consumer of a product had notions of quality that were subjective to personal values, context and expectations. Hence, the challenges facing the service industry were, and remain,

complex and as Moss suggested, "it is impossible to uphold a values-free and context-free definition of quality" (Moss, 1994, p. 27).

Notions of quality have, evolved and adapted, and continue to evolve and adapt with changes in society, politics and the economy over time. This evolution is evident in the literature and emphasised by the ongoing reviews of quality in terms of its definition, parameters or dimensions. Reeves and Bendar (1994), for example, concluded that there is no single global definition of quality and that the meaning changes depending on the context and circumstances of the use. They examined the changes in the different meanings of quality and their applicability in two industries: production and services, and explored the relationship between the four definitions of *quality*: (1) excellence; (2) value; (3) conformance to specifications; and (4) meeting and/or exceeding customers' expectations, and the three key variables in their selected industries, these variables being: price, market share and cost. By doing so, Reeves and Bendar (1994) demonstrated that despite the context of applicability, the way in which quality is defined is likely to change when associated with different variables in each context. One can infer from the four meanings of quality selected by Reeves and Bendar (1994), for the purpose of their study, that there are levels or degrees of quality.

Moss (1994) on the other hand, in his attempt to define quality in early childhood education services, examines it from two different perspectives: the analytical (or otherwise referred to by Moss as the descriptive) and the evaluative. I am reluctant to accept that being 'descriptive' is synonymous with being 'analytical'. These two adjectives convey two distinct meanings. Nevertheless, I take it that the adjective needed for the purpose of Moss's clarification of quality is the one dealing with analysis rather than with pure description. I will deal with the subject based on this assumption.

Analytically, Moss (1994) views quality as a way of describing the nature or core of something, identifying what makes that 'something' what it is. Applying this definition to a service industry, would be to describe (or explain) and understand the components of a particular service. So, in-line with the examples given by Moss (1994), one might ask, *what are the qualities of a teacher or a school leader?* It is

here that different observers of a teacher or school leader would determine different core features as essential. This interpretation of quality focuses on the intrinsic characteristics of the service, and is an interpretation that some may not agree with. For example, Clarke (2002) views quality as purely an external label given to the object, or in this case the service, to indicate a "level of quality" (p. 36). Clarke states that "quality is not an inherent characteristic of a product, but is visually displayed by signs or marks. In other words, a sign or mark is used to indicate a particular level of quality" (Clarke, 2002, p. 36). Here, Clarke is clearly conveying that quality is variable, that there is a need for quality descriptors to define these varying levels and that each level should be distinctly identifiable by a sign or word that is recognisable.

From an evaluative perspective, Moss views quality as a way of assessing the performance of an industry or service measured against set goals or objectives. Moss referrers to these as 'services goals' (Moss, 1994, p. 2). However, even as he tries to define quality, Moss uses adjectives such as 'good' or 'poor' against which he can contextualise or place *quality*. This is similar to the normative meaning of quality used by some, whereby quality "refers to a degree of excellence" (Reddy, 2007, p. 10), thus also implying the need for a scale of excellence, or as Adams (1993) put it, "may also refer to status or relative degree of worth … 'school A is a better school than B.'" (p. 6). Here we find that Adams (1993), Moss (1994), Clarke (2002) and Reddy (2007) allow for multiplicity of possibilities since they all, in their own way, talk about levels or degrees of quality that by default would then require descriptors and labels. Having such levels must include differences both in depth as well as in linear terms. In light of this, reverting to our question: *what are the qualities of a teacher or a school leader?*, we would need to rephrase it so that it becomes more open to different interpretations depending on the observer. In order to widen it, the observer might ask, *what are the attributes apparent as qualities –both subjective and objective- that helps a teacher or a school leader to be effective?*

It is safe to state that attempts to define quality, specifically in the service industry, remain diverse; is it the idealistic *excellence* (*arête)* against which all shall be assessed, or is it the minimum *ideal good* that one can accept? If it is the former, then where is the line drawn to distinguish *excellence* from all else? If the latter, then the minimum *good* denotes notions of *goodness*, implying a *better good*. Subsequently,

either notion suggests that two lines need to be drawn; one that separates *the good* from the much desired *better good*, and one that separates the *good* from the *less than good*.

This basic *triage* of notions of quality is in the experience of everyone in everyday life. It is grounded in society, personal to each individual as basic distinctions in human actions and expectations. Everyone has his or her own notion of what is essentially an *ideal good*. We all have a threshold between what we will accept or reject; we also recognise what is better than merely acceptable. We apply the triage approach to many aspects of our lives every day, including, but not limited to our clothing, our food and beverages experiences, our housing arrangements or our personal transport. This cognitive and informal way of judging quality in our everyday lives is reflected in society, as it attempts to formalise quality in different areas. This can be found in attempts to rate the quality of movies, hotels, restaurants, schools. In all these different industries, attempts are made to classify, rate or grade a product or service (and even an experience) by using terms of reference that denote levels of quality. These in turn are summarised and expressed by the use of symbols or words, such as the use of stars to rate hotels and letters to rate bonds or credit worthiness. It is only fair to state that the measure of quality used in each area is debatable and its applicability limited, thus rendering some of the quality references invalid or inconsistent across cultures or even different towns within the same country, as discussed by Mok and Armstrong (1998) and Briggs, Sutherland and Drummond (2007). It is because the term *quality* is so fluid that these more formal discussions about quality have included grading systems, frameworks and levels of quality describing what each entails. Some may raise the concern that the formalisation of these may be restrictive or rigid and move towards a more general and globalised interpretation thus also ensuring consistency, regardless of the context. And if, as Clarke suggested, "quality is not a characteristic of a product" (2002, p.36) then those responsible for determining the meaning of quality are in a position to influence customers' perceptions of quality or even impose their own standards as normal. One may question the agenda of those who define what constitutes the different levels such as *good* or better quality and the consequences of their definitions for consumers. Nevertheless, the challenge has shifted from agreeing on the meaning of quality to securing an agreement on the levels, the finer

distinctions between each level, and what is to be empirically observed as evidence of the requirements in each level.

In summary, the term *quality* is itself a meaningless word, and many attempts to define it in a changing society have lead to it being a multi-faceted notion that is adapted to the context of use, the variables within that context and the stakeholders that coin the definition or parameters of the quality intended. It is this vagueness surrounding the term that may prompt the familiar and informal use of the *triage* model; in which quality is accompanied by an adjective. One might ask, *is something good? Is it good enough to replicate, share and build on?* To state that a child has *quality manners* is meaningless and offers no indication of what kind of manners are referred to, as *quality* manners expected from a child in a Japanese school are different from those expected in an American school, and are deeply cultural. It is this intrinsic cultural difference that I wish to draw attention to when examining the terms of defining the different levels of quality in the Inspection Framework used to determine the quality of schooling. I now turn to examine relevant literature on how notions of quality are applied to schooling in different contexts.

2.4 Notions of quality in schooling: A conceptual perspective

As a form of labour, stakeholders assess schooling informally and empirically in terms of human actions and the resulting outcomes. The literature directly or indirectly addressing notions of quality in both *schooling* and *education* is vast and the limited space and scope of this study will not allow for an exhaustive review.

As stated earlier, the focus of this study is on *schooling* and not *education* in its wider meaning. Therefore, the literature examined in this section will mainly, but not exclusively, be addressing notions of quality in schooling. I say this primarily because Barrett et al. (2006) correctly point out that in some contexts, such as quality management*, schooling* and *education* have been known to be used interchangeably by equating *institutional effectiveness* with *educational quality.* This morphing of terms in the academic literature has caused some terms to be synonymous or associated with school quality, namely: school efficiency; school effectiveness; school improvement; and, equity (Adams, 1993; Aspin, Chapman and Wilkinson, 1994 and Reddy, 2007).

Over the years the literature has raised, and continues to raise, questions that are central to the discussions surrounding school quality. Adams (1993), Fuller (1986), Aspin, Chapman and Wilkinson (1994) and Ball (2004) appear to ask three similar question regarding school quality: *The quality of what? Quality for whom? And, how to measure such quality*? The literature on these questions is vast. Scholars have, over the decades, approached these questions from a range of perspectives and assumptions regarding schools, students, stakeholders and policy makers (Adams, 1993; Chitty, 2002; Ball, 2004; Fuller, 1986 and Reddy, 2007). Consequently, over the past 50 years different paradigms have emerged in the literature, but pre-eminent are *school effectiveness* and *school accountability*. DSIB has attempted, successfully or unsuccessfully, to combine these two by inspecting the quality of a school's effectiveness through determining the quality of its inputs and outputs; and ensuring accountability to the stakeholders by involving them in the process and publishing school results.

When discussions about school reform became popular in the 1940s and 1950s, the fundamental belief was basically that *we, the government, provide the schools, books and teachers and it is up to you, as a student, to succeed*, in other words, the onus of succeeding in school was mainly on the students. Fuller (1986) and Jansen (1995) argue that it was also during this time that schools' accountability lay within a quantitative culture of basic factual audits, factual data that today are only a minor consideration when examining school quality. The data schools were accountable for producing were central to their success, these data were generally statistical and often included attendance rates, drop out rates, graduation rates and university placements. It was not until the publication of the much contested and debated report, known as the *Coleman Report* (Coleman, et al., 1966) that the focus started to shift from internal factors to consider factors external to a school. The *Coleman Report* had ignited a debate and discussion about the external influences on students' achievement. By external factors I mean what students *bring to the school,* such as their SES and cultural backgrounds (Coleman, et al., 1966). Almost immediately after the publication of their findings, and over the next decades, the *Coleman's Report* findings were revisited, re-tested in different contexts, analysed and critiqued. The main finding that was disputed was that student family backgrounds and SES

had greater effects upon the students' achievement than the internal school factors, i.e. the resources and provision (Coleman, et al., 1966). This general conclusion was supported by the Plowden Report findings from the UK (Gillard, 1967). The questions raised by Coleman and his colleagues were put to the test in developing countries, such as Heyneman's research in Uganda (1976, that extended into the 1980s) and a study by Heyneman and Loxley (1983) examining the influences on academic achievemnt of students across 29 high and low income countries. These studies suggested that Colman's findings could not be generalised to different contexts. Heyneman concluded that in the poorer countries the external factors (SES and cultural background) had a lesser impact on students' achievement in tests than the school factors (Heyneman, 1983a; 1983b).

The explanations given by Heyneman and Loxley for their findings, predictably remain contested in the literature, as discussed by Baker and Holsinger, 1996; Baker, Goesling and LeTendre, 2002 and Heyneman, 2004. This is primarily as a result of the debates surrounding the methodological limitations and the social contexts at the time of their studies. The general dissimilar findings, and explanations thereof, in the Coleman Report and the Heyneman and Loxley Report, have each in their own right contributed to assumptions and conclusions about the roles of schools, society and policy makers in schooling. Those, such as Jencks et al. (1972) and Rothstein (2004), who held the view that schools were ineffective and inefficient, argued for policy changes to enable wider social changes to eliminate poverty divides. They argued that schools were largely seen as tools used to maintain social stratification and were blamed for the low attainment of poorer students. A point that Heyneman (2005) states is unfair on schools, as he attempts to move the discussion about school accountability from the familiar topic of "income or achievement gap" (Heyneman, 2005, p.7) to holding schools accountable for social cohesion, as he perceives the latter to be the real purpose of schooling. Heyneman raises a fair point, not only that schools should not be held accountable for variables that promote subjective beliefs of social justice, but also that the purpose of schooling is not discussed enough in the context of school accountability.

Nevertheless, the preferred finding in literature at the time was that *schools did matter*, and even more so than external factors, such as SES and cultural

backgrounds, hence the phrase 'schools matter' was being widely used in literature, adopted by policy makers, and rarely contested (Murnane, 1981). This led to the trend in research based on the premise that *schools did matter*. Scholars set out to identify the workings of schools that resulted in high student achievement. They then attempt to apply their findings across schools, regardless of their different contexts (Edmonds, 1979; Clark, Lotto and Astuto, 1984).

The *school effectiveness* paradigm was not without its critics; many viewed the *school effectiveness* movement as methodologically and ideologically flawed, yet it remained a widely popular paradigm. Researchers listed what they identified as the main characteristics of *an effective school*, but often disagreed as to their assumptions about schooling and the processes that took place in schools. This was evident in the different attributes ascribed to *effective* schools. Edmond (1979) listed his five cardinal features of an effective school, whereas Austin's (1981) list consisted of 29 features that differed from those produced by Edmond, yet covered the same ideas. It became common practice for schools to be measured against such features of an effective school; this practice led to school *development* planning according to the same features. Schools were expected to fit the mould of what an *effective school* was, in some cases despite the different contexts of the schools used as models and those *being developed* or *improving*. This is in itself a rather peculiar way of having *one model fits all,* regardless of local context and other characteristics. It appears that the *schools did matter* movement, positively or negatively, facilitated increased pressure on schools to conform to the ever-changing trend of the *effective school*. Schools were now trapped into a race of keeping up with the latest trends, findings and recommendations regarding how to enhance the quality of not only their *product*, but also the inner workings of the school, i.e., their *processes*.

This rapidly emerging paradigm of school effectiveness, rooted in the *schools did matter* movement, is one that was largely foreign to the GCC region until recently. Publications on the topic, mainly reference books used in university courses or by educators, were being translated into Arabic[14] and introduced to the educational arena in the UAE. There was a sense of urgency to keep up with the latest so-called

[14] A list of the main publications translated into Arabic can be found on http://www.ascd.org/Publications/Books/ASCD-Book-Translations.aspx#Arabic

international trends of school effectiveness (Bayoumi, 2013; Ibrahim, 2014), even if they appeared inapplicable, either contextually or philosophically. This was most evident in the increased number of professional development sessions covering a range of school effectiveness topics (ADEC, 2013; Halawa, 2014; Ibrahim, 2014). The content underwent little if no modification to make it applicable and relevant to the local schools and their needs. Of course, many would argue that this is precisely the process that would lead to good performing schools and had previously taken place in England because of Ofsted. Since 1993, there has been an increasing emphasis on Ofsted's definition of what constitutes *good* education. This has led, as it has now done in Dubai, to a *one model fits all* approach to teaching and learning without taking into account any local contexts. Yet Ofsted inspectors make judgements based on an already generally agreed school quality paradigm. This leads to a strong belief that individuality is lost and that all schools must follow the one agreed model, to the detriment of individual leaders, teachers and student. At this stage, the jury is out as to whether this is actually the case. It is my belief that these concerns do need serious research to establish whether they are justified or not.

So it is fair to state that following the *schools did matter* movement, the burden became greater for schools, as they were no longer assessed on the achievements of students alone. Rather the focus was on the processes and inner workings of schools. Schools were now expected to accommodate and support the different needs of students, including for example, providing meals for less privileged students (Hobbs and Vignoles, 2010; Dimbleby and Vincent, 2013). This quickly extended to meeting students' different needs, be they educational, physical, emotional, mental or social, by providing access to different specialist teachers (such as English As Additional Language teachers and Special Education Needs teachers), social workers, counsellors and psychologists (The Summerfield Report, 1968; DfES, 2001; Baginsky, 2014). The burden on schools was further added to with the expectations set out by policy makers and legislations, such as those concerned with inclusion, integration, health and safety. I do not mean to imply that educators' attitudes were negative, exclusive or unacceptable. Rather, I mean to emphasise that the expectations on schools was broadening and consequently the role of teachers was being significantly reshaped. With this development, notions of quality schooling were also broadening (Travers and Cooper, 1996; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002).

Therefore, what started as an academic discourse of school effectiveness quickly became a governmental concern about school accountability and quality, whereby politicians brought ideas of quality to bear upon real schools. They determined that *we the government will go into schools and ask this set of questions, gather evidence and establish a school's quality.* Although, academics could barely agree on what the indicators of quality might be, their academic discourse becomes the terms of reference for a school inspectorate. This resulted in the government formalising and legislating what it defined as the indicators of school quality. These became a part of the daily conversations about *quality* in schools. Yes, these indicators have been regularly reviewed and revised, but the terms of reference to quality have already been established in schools and are reflected in their daily functioning, almost religiously. Thus, one can state that the force of the law has produced a standardisation of *quality* in schooling which, in itself, has produced new issues to do with a *one model fits all*, a perceived loss of individuality, an assumption as to what constitutes a *good* school even if local circumstances dictate otherwise, a politicisation of schools at the expense of real learning.

So, how does this impact defining quality schooling in Dubai? In 2008 The KHDA set its stall out on defining quality schooling when it published its first school Inspection Framework. Yet another example of a government formalising and legislating what it defines as the appropriate indicators of school quality paradigm. This study adopts this approach and school quality as defined by the *quality indicators* used by the KHDA.

2.4.1 School accountability and school inspections

Attempting to define *school inspections* and their purpose is relatively straight forward, as the literature presents little evidence of conflict or disagreement on the matter. Much of the literature in the 1960s to 1990s and more recent literature on school inspection, such as the work of Wilcox (2000), Dedering and Müller (2011) and others, mostly agree that inspecting schools, is a process of evaluating the quality of a school as a complete entity in order to hold it accountable for its outcomes, as is widely practiced across the world. However, according to Wilcox (2000), over the

past two decades the role of inspections has been propelled into a catalyst for school improvement.

During the 1960s and 1970s in the UK, inspection findings, specifically on the standards of children across England and Wales was, according to Lee and Fitz (1997), one of the main prompts leading to the introduction of The National Curriculum of England and Wales in the 1980s; its method of delivery and the standardisation of the main characteristics of good teaching practice. The debates surrounding the ideologies and models used to prescribe good teaching (Ehren and Visscher, 2006), for example, quickly moved from an academic debate to political one and what was once a sociological discourse became politicised *expected practice* outlined in a school inspection framework. Research into the effectiveness of school inspections on school improvement is vast and opinions are divided, however it is not within the scope of this study to examine these, suffice to say that the debate on this matter is on-going and becoming a global discussion as more countries introduce inspections as both a tool for accountability and improvement.

In countries where school inspections take place, such as in the UK, Holland, Germany, Singapore, the UAE, Qatar and Kenya the perception of inspections are highly culturalised, including the meaning that both the general public and in some cases the inspectors and educators themselves have negative connotations of inspections that are related to fault finding rather than assessing and supporting. Added to this are school leaders and teachers feeling under siege by what they perceive as arrogant civil servants who have been out of the classroom for decades (Brimblecombe, Ormston and Shaw, 1995; Ehren and Visscher, 2008).

The question of *how effective a school is at delivering quality schooling* was propelled to the forefront of researchers' agendas mainly during the late 1970s, to early 1990s. There was a rising ideological backlash against government spending, school provision and accountability (Leithwood, 2005). Demand for greater government accountability for public schooling explains both the surge of literature and research concerned with school accountability at the time, as well as the focus on reforming the role of Her Majesty's Inspectorate (HMI) in the 1990s in its capacity as reporting the quality of schooling (Wilcox and Gray, 1996). The idea was also to

provide parents with information about the quality of schooling and thus providing them with the information needed to make choices about their children's schooling, especially after the British Prime Minister John Major put forward the idea of a Citizen's Charter (Cm 1599, 1991). Furthermore, Major wanted a system of accountability to Parliament through inspections. The role of HMI was later contested in the late 1990's early 2000s, as it was claimed that few parents used inspection findings to make better choices; but rather, findings were mostly used against school leaders (Elliot, 2012). We do not know how, or even if, parents were educated or instructed to interpret the reports, again raising a question concerning the public value of categorising schools. Nevertheless, inspections remain. School inspection reports and annual aggregate findings continue to be published alongside school 'league tables'. Although the practice of publishing inspection results, specifically online, is mainly found in England, the Netherlands (Ehren & Visscher, 2008) and Dubai.

Her Majesty's Inspectors have been inspecting schools since 1839 and were responsible mainly for providing feedback to ministers about the state of government-funded schools (Thomas, 1998). Their role and advice was often viewed as controversial and ministers did not always agree with claims made in annual report produced by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector, such as those made regarding the state of some of the school facilities in the 1989 annual report (Cullingford, 1999). Therefore, as part of an educational reform, The Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) was established in 1992, and started inspecting schools under a new inspection framework at the beginning of the academic year in 1993. The requirement to create a framework for school quality, meant that educators had to establish common quality indicators, abstract concepts that could be applied to the empirical reality of what took place in schools. With different, and sometimes contrasting notions of quality, agreeing on notions of school quality, and how to measure them, was a challenge. The first framework was viewed as multi faceted, culturally subjective and linked with beliefs about the role of schools in society (Behrman and Birdsall, 1983; Chitty, 2002). Nevertheless, a seven-point scale and grading system was produced and each grade was established with evaluation criteria. The descriptors ranged from *excellent* to *very poor*, with *excellent* enumerated as (1), *good* as (3), *satisfactory* as a (4); and *very poor* as a (7). This

meant that *good* quality schooling was defined by the descriptors in the inspection handbook and given a numerical value of 3. It was legislated so, even while contested amongst educators and academics. An academic debate about good quality schooling became the law.

Over the next few years the inspection handbook, methods, data, evidence, reports and the grading system were all reviewed and adjusted. Some would argue that Ofsted's regular changes of criteria for inspections, as is the case with the DSIB, are indicators of its inherent weakness and of the politicisation of schooling. Both would argue that they have and continue to develop, improve and adapt their practices to ensure that schools are judged against the best standards.

School inspections in the UK were not limited to the public schools alone as the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) has a mandate to inspect schools that are privately funded, including those based upon religious principles. Similarly, Bridge Schools Inspectorate (Bridge School Inspectorate, 2009) has authority to inspect Christian and Muslim schools. Both ISI and BSI apply a simplified framework during on-site inspections. The inspection of British schools has also extended to their schools overseas with the establishment of the *British Schools Overseas* Inspections (BSO). It conducts inspections around the world, contracted through the Council for British Teaching (CfBT). In Dubai, BSO conducts joint inspections with DSIB to inspect the UK curriculum schools. The frameworks used by both BSO and DSIB are similar to the Ofsted framework, both in terms of questions asked and qualitative judgements made. Overseas BSO inspections have also taken place in Kuwait, Malaysia and Singapore, among other countries.

2.4.2 School inspections in the United Arab Emirates: Dubai

The introduction of school inspection in Dubai is part of a growing trend of national governments using inspections as a tool to govern their educational systems (Ozga, 2009) and in their cases "satisfy governmental demands for greater transparency within the public services" (Baxter and Clarke, 2013, p. 707). Dubai established an inspectorate, the DSIB, in 2008. Other than the Emiri (or Royal) Decree establishing a schools inspection bureau in Dubai, and unlike the very public, political debates in

the UK leading to the establishment of Ofsted with review of the role of HMI, there is almost no public or academic record of a discourse leading up to the establishment of the DSIB to inspect private schools in Dubai. This opened the door to speculation in the social, educational and academic fields. Currently only private schools are inspected by the DSIB and all are inspected annually using a framework of six Key Questions (KQs) originally derived from the Ofsted model and modified to suit the local context. The six KQs are divided into school outputs and inputs. The first two indicators are outputs and focus on the academic and social development of students. Academically it assesses students' attainment and progress. Socially, it attempts to assess the personal and social development of students and their understanding of the religion and culture of the host country. The second part of the inspection framework assesses the schools' inputs and provision. These are mainly the quality of teaching, learning and assessment, the quality of the curriculum, health and safety in the school, and the quality of leadership including the use of resources. The DSIB, having examined a range of international inspection models, relied upon Ofsted inspectors for support of DSIB in producing both the inspection framework and the methods of inspection. After examination of the terms used and the assumptions made in the DSIB framework, it is fair to conclude that the Ofsted model heavily influenced it.

2.4.3 School inspections in the United Arab Emirates: Abu Dhabi and the Northern Emirates

As of September 2015, the UAE has created a unified UAE Inspection Framework, which is an amalgamation of the inspection frameworks used in Abu Dhabi and Dubai (KHDA et al., 2015). However, prior to September 2015 the emirate of Abu Dhabi followed the lead of Dubai and established *Irtiqa'a*, or improvement, in 2011.

The practice of school inspections has become international. More so as questions are being asked and reported on about the quality of schooling in other countries using *key questions* or *quality indicators*, albeit under various political and social contexts and with varying schooling arenas as in some countries or provinces private schools outnumber public schools. It is interesting to note that some countries such as Finland have completely shunned inspection practice and focused their energies on enhancing the teaching profession, improving its professional prospects and

providing a first class initial teacher training as ways of improving students' learning and raising standards.

2.4.4 Comparing jurisdictions that conduct on-site inspections

Other countries and jurisdictions attempt to determine school quality. There is a broad, but not full, consensus on the important questions that need to be asked about school provision, outcomes and the development of students both academically and socially while at school. Examining the different inspection frameworks of the jurisdictions that conduct on-site inspections, such as Canada, Cayman Islands, China (Hong Kong), Jamaica, Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland and the USA, there are widely agreed questions asked about school quality, including:

1. How well students are attaining the expected and appropriate learning outcomes of the curriculum;
2. How much progress students are making, as measured against their different starting points;
3. What learning skills students are developing, appropriate to their ages;
4. How well students are developing appropriate personal attitudes and social skills;
5. How well teachers teach;
6. How well teachers and schools assess learning and use the assessment information to help students make further progress;
7. How well the curriculum matches students' existing knowledge and skills;
8. How healthy, safe and supportive school environments are;
9. How effective school leaders are;
10. How well each school's facilities and resources support leaders, teachers and students in their work.

For the purposes of comparison, I will call the ten questions above *Key Questions (KQs)*. The first four key questions are about the outcomes for students and the last six are about the provision by the school. These ten questions are sometimes asked in combination (for example, questions about students' attainment and progress) or separately (for example, questions about the written curriculum and how it is

delivered to students). Some questions are more highly developed than others. For example, questions about the support of students may or may not explicitly mention those with special educational needs. Other questions that are asked about school performance include those explicitly about parental involvement, governance, financial management and the tracking of graduates through tertiary education.

Table 2 below shows the common questions across different jurisdictions, as well as Edmonds' (1979) classic 'five factor model' of school effectiveness.

Table 2: A comparison of key questions asked in school performance or inspection frameworks

	KQ1. Students' attainment of curricula?	KQ2. QI2. Students' progress?	KQ3. Students' learning skills?	KQ4. Students' social development?	KQ5. Teaching quality?	KQ6. Assessment of learning?	KQ7. Curriculum quality?	KQ8. Health, safety and support?	KQ9. Leadership & Management?	KQ10. Facilities, staffing & resources?
Abu Dhabi	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Canada CAIS (CAIS, 2011)				Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes
Cayman (ESUA, 2011)	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Dubai	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Hong Kong	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Jamaica (NEI, 2013)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes
Netherlands (DIE, 2007)	Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes		
New Zealand (Clark, 2014)	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
Scotland (Education Scotland, 2011)	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes	
UK - Ofsted (Ofsted, 2014)	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes			Yes	Yes	
UK - ISI	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UK - BSO	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
USA – NAIS (NAIS, 2007)				Yes				Yes	Yes	Yes
'Five Factors'	Yes		Yes			Yes		Yes	Yes	

Total Key Questions shared:	12	8	6	11	9	6	9	14	13	7

The table above shows that some KQs are more common than others. The most commonly asked questions are those that are considered easiest to provide and measure. For example, providing a safe and healthy school does not require high levels of expertise but rather high levels of care. Measuring students' attainment is done mostly through testing. Conversely, judging the quality of students' progress is much more difficult and yet more important to the development of each student. Similarly, understanding how effectively schools use assessment information to modify the curriculum and teaching strategies requires high levels of expertise.

There clearly are common KQs shared across different countries, yet the appropriateness of asking them outside the context within which they were created is itself open to question. This is similar to Jansen's (1995) conclusion when he examined the literature on school effectiveness as it was applied outside the West. Jansen found that "much of the application of the effective schools research outside of the West has erroneously rested on fixed assumptions about schooling and resources transferred to the developing world" (Jansen, 1995, p. 181). Applied to the context of school inspections, quality indicators should be determined by the agreed view held by the local community or government regarding schooling. In the absence of government funding or the regulation of private schools operating a non-government curriculum, it would be difficult if not unrealistic to try and determine a single philosophy of schooling to apply across all these schools, i.e. the private schools in Dubai. I say this mainly because inspection systems in the West, such as Ofsted or the Dutch Inspectorate of Education (DIE, 2007, 2009) are home grown systems that have adapted over time to the changing needs and demands of their social, political, economic or religious contexts. When these schools are transplanted internationally, (e.g. the 13 different curriculum schools in Dubai), they are faced with the challenge of retaining their homeland's schooling requirements and meeting the requirements of the hosting country. Such a situation often causes a mismatch which can be quite difficult to resolve, and which involves the authorities having to exercise considerable sensitivity in handling appropriately. Therefore, the challenge

of creating an inspection tool that would fairly hold all schools accountable to the quality of provision and outcome was the main challenge for the DSIB. I will discuss this further below.

2.4.5 The Inspection Framework

The main challenge for DSIB was the creation of a single inspection framework with KQs that would be applicable across all the different schools. The DSIB state that when their Inspection Framework was created, it was based on researching findings into the best international practices in both school inspections and effectiveness, and thus justified its applicability to all curricula in the private schooling sector. The DSIB Inspection Handbooks states that

> '… the choice of indicators is based on research into school effectiveness. While there are legitimate disagreements about some aspects of the purpose of schooling, there is an almost universal consensus in the literature that an effective school will seek to secure the best possible academic or cognitive outcomes, while also enabling students to thrive in terms of personal development, interpersonal skills and the affective side of human development' (KHDA, 2009c, p.12).

Therefore, the Key Questions (KQs) and Quality Indicators (QIs) were assumed to be sufficiently universal and all encompassing to be the valid gauge against which the quality of schooling would be judged. By doing so, the DSIB determined the indicators, and subsequently the framework, that would define the reality of quality schooling. This framework outlined six KQs in addition to a seventh question about overall quality. The KQs are:

KQ1. How good are the students' attainment and progress?
KQ2. How good is the students' personal and social development?
KQ3. How good are the teaching, learning and assessment?
KQ4. How well does the curriculum meet the educational needs of all students?
KQ5. How well does the school protect and support students?
KQ6. How good are the leadership and management of the school?

These KQs are measured against four categories of school quality, namely; *outstanding, good, acceptable* and *unsatisfactory*.

These are answered as means of then answering KQ7: How well does the school perform overall?

KQs 1, 2, 3 and 4 are inspected and reported on according to the different phases in a school. School phases are primarily as follows:

Phase 1: Kindergarten, or pre-primary school – mainly children from three to four or five years of age.
Phase 2: Primary school or elementary – mainly children from ages five or six to 12 years of age.
Phase 3: Middle school – students aged 13 to 15 years.
Phase 4: Secondary school – students from ages 16 to 18 years.

The KQs and the illustrative quality descriptors for the QIs in the Inspection Framework cover the main common questions asked in school performance or other inspection frameworks, as shown in Table 2.

The creation and use of a qualitative accountability inspection framework by the DSIB, for a mostly transient international private schooling population, placed it in the position of being a producer and implementer of a discourse of quality schooling that influenced the way in which schools viewed and conceptualised provision and outcomes (Baxter, 2013). Such a move may be viewed as ensuring some form of consistency across the schools, with regards to key areas of a school's operations – those outlined in the QIs. This is not an unfamiliar situation, as The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) founded the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI) in Europe that is considered a form of quality assurance and accountability across inspectorates in Europe where there is increased internationalisation and mobility (Grek et al., 2013).

2.4.6 Answering the KQs by evaluating performance

With respect to evaluative categories, there are a range of practices across different jurisdictions that assess the quality of schooling. Some jurisdictions answer these

KQs, (and others) about school quality by setting qualitative categories. They are applied to each KQ to evaluate a school's quality, and often to evaluate a school's overall quality. Words such as *outstanding*, *good* and *acceptable* are commonly found in the documents governing school quality, as are phrases like *needs improvement*, *very unsatisfactory* or *needs very urgent support.*

Table 3 below compares how different authorities evaluate school performance.

Table 3: A comparison of the evaluative categories used in different jurisdictions. The above table does not include all the jurisdictions listed in Table 1. In Table 2 the *plus (+) sign* indicates that additional categories are used.

Location	Much better than competent performance	Better than competent performance	Competent performance	Less than competent performance
Abu Dhabi	Very good ++	Good	Satisfactory +	Unsatisfactory +
Canada CAIS			Sufficient	Insufficient
Canada - Ontario			Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
Cayman	Very good	Good	Adequate	Unsatisfactory
Dubai	Outstanding	Good	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Hong Kong	Excellent	Good	Acceptable	Unsatisfactory
Jamaica	Exceptionally high	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory +
Netherlands			Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory
New Zealand	A variety of adjectives are used to answer the key questions.			
Scotland	Very Good+	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory +
South Africa	A variety of adjectives are used to answer the key questions.			
UK Ofsted	Outstanding	Good	Requires improvement	Inadequate
UK - ISI	Excellent	Good	Sound	Unsatisfactory
UK - BSO	Outstanding	Good	Satisfactory	Inadequate
USA - NAIS			Sufficient	Insufficient

Several observations can be made from Table 3. Firstly, the number of evaluative categories applied to school quality range from eight in Abu Dhabi to just two in Ontario's quality appraisal framework. More commonly, four categories of quality are used. For example, Ofsted (and others) in the UK, the Cayman Islands, the DISB and the Education Bureau of Hong Kong use four categories to evaluate school quality. All systems of evaluation distinguish between *satisfactory* and *unsatisfactory*

quality, yet there appear to be finer distinctions then made on either side of that basic divide, leading to the array of categories observed. The great majority add a category of quality above *satisfactory*, usually given as *good* and then a superlative level known as *very good,* or *outstanding* or *excellent* quality. The decision to use four quality categories by the DSIB is therefore clearly in line with other practices in inspectorates internationally, and thus giving it credibility when compared to other school accountability systems.

As discussed previously, the private schooling system in Dubai can be described as a market for services. In it, consumers (i.e., the paying parents) select a school for their children with curriculum expectations, financial constraints, and notions of quality attached to the service provided. The schools operating within this market environment cannot but be affected by that which drives it: profit. Although there are private schools in Dubai that operate as non-profit, even these are affected by the competition for students, as evidenced by the waiting lists which are full in some schools for the next two to four years (Dhal, 2013). Admission is not guaranteed as the waiting lists create a pool from which children are selected for admission. Although there are no formal announcements from the KHDA about the waiting lists, or the 'hidden' children of Dubai unable to join schools, the local newspapers regularly raise this matter. Below are some comments from parents:

> *"I must have tried at least 30 schools. ... My daugher and I may have to go back to the UK as she has not got a seat anywhere so far. I never thought it would be so difficult.* [sic]*"* (Gulf News, 2013a).

> *"There were queues extending up to a kilometer when I had gone to collect a token for the lottary for KG1 admissions at [Indian school]. And all this for just 100 seats from several thousand applications.* [sic]*"*[15] (Gulf News, 2013b)

[15] Although the authors of most of these quotations were named in the newspaper, they will remain anonymous in this thesis, as the identity of the parents cannot be verified. All quotations are as they appear in the source, including grammatical and spelling errors.

In some of the schools, such as the Indian school mentioned in the quotation above, the demand for seats (i.e. student places) out-numbers availability by thousands, a lottery system is used. The fairness of such systems, although questioned by many parents, is defended by the school owners and leaders as the only unbiased way of allocating seats to potential students (Kannan, 2012; Gokulan, 2012).

2.5 Summary

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the definition of private schools in Dubai does not neatly fit with the wider meanings of privatisation. Thus demonstrating that schools operating within the private sector do not conform to the conceptual frameworks of privatisation of public services or creating an alternative private-public sector that is in competition with the public one or there to support it.

This Chapter also highlights available literature on the meaning of quality, quality schooling and how quality is generally assessed within different national contexts. What is of interest is the fact that in creating a way of measuring the quality of schooling provision as well as outcomes, various national governments have ended up prescribing what constitutes *good* or better schooling. Such a focus on the process raises serious questions about the values underlying the chosen qualities. Indeed, it raises questions about the qualities that were *not* chosen. The chosen qualities also raise serious questions about their effects, given the fact of parental choice. In other words, do parents choose what is best for their children based on what they think would benefit them, or, given the discrete qualities put before them by governments, do they make school choices that the government wants them to make? If the latter is the case, there is an inherent problem: what is constructed as *good* in today's world may not have been so twenty years ago and may not be so in another twenty years from now. Does this mean that such limited choices are predicated on fashionable rather than on critical thinking?

Additionally, this chapter has attempted to highlight some of the available literature on SES and the ways in which SES has been assessed in different contexts. It is interesting that in the context of the GCC, notions of SES are heavily associated with nationality and race, as salary structures and employment opportunities are racially stratified, a practice that is highly frowned upon in liberal democracies. Nevertheless,

such a situation has meant that for the majority of the expatriate population the challenge of finding the best affordable schooling for their children is a reality that is overcast by regular hikes in school fees and the 'imposed' notion of quality as determined by the government by annual school inspections. There is a void in the research about the kind of schooling you get for the amount of money you are able to pay. It is this relationship between the quality and cost of schooling that I want to uncover further in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF THE RESEARCH INQUIRY

3.1 Introduction

As discussed in earlier chapters, the overwhelming majority of Dubai's student population (86 per cent) is restricted to attending fee charging private schools (KHDA, 2013d), and have very limited access to government funded schools. The Dubai Government, through annual school inspections, monitors each private school's provision and outcomes and publishes individual school inspection reports annually. It also publishes an Annual Report, in which it outlines each year's overall findings and long-term trends. The market nature of private schools in Dubai means that parents pay different prices, depending upon a school fee structure. Competition between schools for students is fierce, and thus questions arise about the affordability of *good* or *outstanding* quality schooling for parents. This study explored what quality of provision and outcomes parents received for the fees they paid when controlling other factors; in other words, what value they got for their money.

3.2 The conceptual focus and research objective and questions

The conceptual focus of this study is to contribute to literature on access and choice within a market driven private schooling sector in a neoliberal context where access to public schooling is limited, and almost exclusive, to indigenous citizens.

The main objective of this research was to examine the extent to which students of lower socio-economic status had access to *good* or *outstanding* quality of schooling within the private fee-charging sector.

The main hypothesis: *in the absence of government funded schooling, students who attend higher fee charging private schools are more likely to receive better quality schooling that those who attend lower fee charging schools.* The subsidiary questions:

1. *How do different factors affect the odds of students receiving good or outstanding quality schooling?*
2. *What is the KHDA's perception of fees in relation to inspection findings?*

3. *To what extent does the definition of quality as outlined in the Inspection Framework affect different curricula schools attaining good or outstanding schooling?*

3.3 Research approach

In order to address the questions, I employed qualitative and quantitative techniques (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006; Creswell and Plano, 2007), which were applied in two phases:

1. A quantitative study and statistical analysis: This phase of the study aimed at identifying the probability of students receiving better quality schooling (as defined by the quality of teaching and the quality of students' attainment in English, mathematics and science) as fees increased, controlling for other factors.
2. A qualitative study: The findings of the qualitative analysis allowed for further explanation and contextualization of the quantitative results that were significant, non-significant or surprising (Morse, 1991; Punch, 2009).

These techniques allowed me to "assess trends and relationships with quantitative data but also be able to explain the mechanism or reasons behind the results" (Cresswell and Plano, 2003, p. 82). I was also able to utilise the strengths of each, whilst compensating for their weaknesses. The quantitative aspect enabled me to use a large number of inspection judgements from the 115 school reports (Punch, 2009) in order to "conceptualize reality in terms of variables" (Punch, 2009, p. 298) and test the hypothesis by statistically examining the data to identify both trends and relationships (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative aspect allowed for a more holistic understanding of the quantitative findings. By focusing on the reports (Creswell and Plano, 2007) and conducting an in depth study of the context of the data, I was more able to compensate for the quantitative approach "stripping data from their context" (Punch, 2007, p.294).

It is generally accepted that the choice of methods and the kind of knowledge generated in a study reflects a researchers' view of the world, or their paradigm

(Hughes, 2001; Sobh and Perry, 2006). I will now consider this in the next section as I reason my choice of research design and method.

I approach this study with the overall view that reality is moderately socially constructed (Berger and Luckmann, 1984; Kwan and Tsang, 2001), not in the sense that people or different structures and groups of people socially construct *all reality*, but rather their *beliefs about reality*, specifically their *epistemic*[16] claims about reality, and that they hold these beliefs because of the effects and role these beliefs have on their lives and society (Boghossian, n.d.). However, in saying that I believe that moderate social constructionism (Gorski, 2013) can be compatible with critical realism, as argued by Elder-Vass, 2012[17], who calls for a bridging of the gap between the beliefs of the moderate realists and moderate social constructionists and argues for a socially constructionist realism (Elder-Vass, 2012, p. 7). Accordingly, this study was based on the idea that, although beliefs about reality and knowledge (the quality of schooling) may be socially constructed (by educational authorities and stakeholders such as parents), some ideas have more validity than others, within different contexts. In this study the nature of the observed reality of the quality of schooling, as communicated by inspection judgements, is socially constructed by the KHDA, but this can be tested and improved using data.

However, as suggested by Creswell and Plano (2003) I adopted a more post-positivist approach to the quantitative aspect of the study, in developing the quantitative research design, its model, variables and for analysing the findings.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the notion of quality is highly subjective. Prior to the establishment of the school inspections by the KHDA, there was no *official* point of reference within the society as to what constituted *good* quality schooling. Parents, teachers, students and even school owners would have, from a constructivist point of view, held their own beliefs as what *good* quality schools entailed: culturally, economically, politically, pedagogically and even financially. But the establishment of the Inspection Framework created a point of reference in society and in doing so; a *reality* that is *organisation subjective* about what is believed about *good* quality

[16] As apposed to a metaphysical claim that something is real as a result of one's own creation (Boghossian, n.d.).
[17] It is not within the scope of this study to expound on this compatibility.

schooling, becomes the knowledge and point of reference. This knowledge, however, is temporary, as evidenced by the annual changes and updates to the Inspection Framework; it exists for a specific time and to serve a specific purpose.

The methodological approach to this study originated from my belief that any *knowledge* that schooling quality is *outstanding, good, acceptable* or *unsatisfactory*, as defined by the KHDA, may have implications on who has access to the *better quality schooling*, as applied to the private schools sector. Therefore, this study was primarily focused on examining the effect of increased fees (quantitative) on the quality of schooling when controlling for other factors, and then using official documentation (qualitative) to further explain and contextualise the findings.

The study was unobtrusive (Robson, 2002) and the data were collected from public government online documents and websites. The prime reason for this approach was to use information and data produced by an official educational authority about its own conceptualisation of quality schooling, and further examine the relationship, if any, between the quality of schooling and fees charged. Although some references to school fees were present within some of these documents, it was unclear *who received the better quality schooling and at what cost?* Therefore, the primary sources of data were official documents and webpages, extracting and analysing the data quantitatively and qualitatively in order to answer the research questions.

3.4 Data used for the study

This study was based on publically available information generated by the KHDA in Dubai regarding the quality of schooling and the schools' fees. I chose to use this public information as my data sets for two reasons. Firstly, the published information on the quality of schooling, as defined by the KHDA, is key to government policy making in Dubai; therefore, it is worthy of further scrutiny and analysis as it is the only officially accepted notion of quality schooling. Secondly, inspection reports are the only official information available on an annual basis, and they provide continuous information, that if examined, may provide insights into the beliefs and assumptions about school quality that informs policies.

The information generated from school inspections was not intended for academic research[18]; nonetheless, I find that the quality judgements and reports have research value, as they establish an official record of the quality of schooling that begs further investigation. As pointed out by Mazawi (1999), Alghazo and Gaad (2004), Clarke and Otaky (2006), Muysken and Nour (2006) and Bouhlila (2013, 2015), the GCC countries are in need of research into their schooling and pre-university education systems that contributes to literature and that may be considered by policy makers. This study relied on examining the findings of the school inspections, to contribute to the discussion regarding access to quality schooling, with a focus on the context of private, market-provided schooling and no access to public schooling. I assume that the KHDA created their knowledge about quality using the broadly agreed indicators of school effectiveness as outlined in the Inspection Framework.

For this study, I took the approach of broadly considering school inspection to be case studies that generated important information in the form of quality judgements. It may be argued that school inspections are not strictly academic case studies, and rightly so, as will be discussed later; nonetheless, they provide official and empirical insights into the work of schools that are accepted by policy makers in the UAE and GCC region. These insights into schools, through the lens of *school quality* as outlined by the KHDA, would almost be impossible to obtain any other way. Public access to schools is restricted, and only very few schools would choose to participate in a private case study.

As I discussed in Chapter Two, extensive research has explored factors influencing the quality of students schooling considering their socio-economic background and other factors, depending on the aims of the study. A large proportion of this work exists within the context of public schooling, privatisation or marketization (with the latter two involving process of change); but few consider a context in which the model of market-provided schooling dominates the schooling landscape in the absence of public schooling, and in which school inspection outcomes influence school fees.

[18] I will expound on this later in the chapter.

With inspection outcomes linked to fee increases (KHDA, 2012d), the question arises of the effects of such a policy on access to quality schooling. Schools that are able to reach the expected standards, which are judged as *good* or *outstanding,* are able to raise their tuition fees significantly. Schools that do not reach these accepted standards, and are judged as *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory*, are unable to raise their fees, with few exceptions.

In this study I used the inspection findings and fees charged by the schools for the academic year 2012/2013. This specific cycle of inspection (2012/2013) was chosen for several reasons; firstly, it was the fifth cycle of annual inspections and a landmark annual report (the quinquennial report) was produced with a summary of findings for the first five years of inspections. This report highlighted changes, improvements and areas that remain weak within school at the end of five years, this information should be insightful in understanding trends and findings during this time. Secondly, five years can be considered a sufficient time for schools to have become familiar with the inspections, Inspection Framework and respond to some of the recommendations from their inspection visits. Thirdly, the Inspection Framework remained largely unchanged during the first five years, but was changed significantly in the subsequent years, with changes to the structure of the inspection framework, the annual reports and the report contents, thus making comparisons across QIs less valid. A new framework was introduced in September 2015. Finally, in the fifth year of inspections, official information on the tuition fees charged by schools were made public by the KHDA, including the type of school and the predominant student passport region, all of which were included in this study.

Although schools were judged as being *outstanding, good, acceptable or unsatisfactory*, an expected minimum standard of *good* was set by the KHDA. In other words, schools judged as *acceptable* and *unsatisfactory* were providing a quality of schooling that was below expectations and consequently were not 'rewarded' with the authorisation to increase tuition fees (KHDA, 2012c, 2012d). In light of this, I started this study by identifing overall trends, using descriptive statistics, when considering all four quality judgements, I then used an ordinal scale with a dichotomy of school quality, based on their ability to raise fees (i.e. the quality

of schooling is *good* or *outstanding)*, or not (i.e. quality of schooling is *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory*), this will be discussed later in this chapter.

Inspections produce a set of qualitative quality judgments on each of the KQs and an overall school performance judgement. In this study I decided not to consider the overall judgement of a school as the dependent variable, but rather I chose to consider variables that were indicators of a school's quality of provision, and indicators of the quality of a school's outcomes. I also decided not to use individual schools as the unit of analysis, rather the phases. The number of phases in schools varied, and for uniformity of comparison and analysis, phases of schools were used. Schools were divided into their phases and the data were collected on each phase. There were two reason for this, and for not selecting the overall judgement of a school as an indicator of the quality of schooling:

1. I do not subscribe to the notion of summarising the complex workings of a school in single overall judgement of quality. Schools were labelled using the *overall* quality of a school using one of the four quality categories. This allowed for schools to be ranked and led to the publication of *league tables* of schools based upon inspection findings (KHDA, 2009b; 2010a; 2011a; 2012a; 2013a). The publication of quality league tables may appeal to those who value single overall labels as indicative of the internal workings of a school. However, overall ratings are just that: a general overall rating of a school and can be misleading at times and often becomes used or misused by any stakeholder. In Wilcox's (2000) critique of inspection methods, he raises the problem of inspectors "generalising judgements" (Wilcox, 2000, p. 10) across a school based on their sampling method. The idea of being able to make a single overall quality judgement to a school, an entity that functions in a complex and dynamic manner, based on an inspection is one that I do not support. Especially when the KQ 7 focuses on the outcome of specific KQs, and neglects others. Additionally an overall judgement does not necessarily reflect the overall quality in each phase, in schools that have more than one phase. It does not reflect the context, such as population distribution between different phases, or the improvements of lack of, in different phases. Inspection reports do not report on the overall judgement of each KQ broadly across an entire school, but separately for each phase. The data provided in

the reports is phase based for specific QIs and KQs, such as Q1, 2, 3 and 4, would be to divide the schools into their phases and consider each phase a unit of analysis, and use the judgements pertaining to specific KQs of provision and outcome for each phase.

2. School tuition fees were provided for each individual grade level in a school. For this study I chose to use the fees that were charged at the end of phase, this would be the highest fee charged in a phase. Some studies and publications, such as that conducted by KHDA (20212c), referred to the average school fees across Dubai and this presents several issues. Firstly, this does not consider the possibility that the fees across schools in Dubai might not be symmetrically distributed, in which case the median would have been a better option, and that a few extreme values may affect the results. Secondly, parents paying for school fees do not pay the mean or median but the actual price indicated, and assuming a child will continue through till the end of a phase, it was best to use the final fee charged in a phase.

3.4.1 Selection of variables

In this study I was concerned with examining the effects of different variables on the quality of schooling. I extracted the dependent variables directly from the KQs in the Inspection Framework;

1. The quality of provision: The general consensus in literature is that the quality of teaching is of high significance when considering the quality of school provision (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2008; Baker et al., 2014). Other factors such as the quality of leadership (Griffith, 2004) and the facilities and resources provided are also important. However, the inspection reports recorded one qualitative judgement, from among *outstanding, good, acceptable* or *unsatisfactory* for each; one judgement for the quality of leadership and one for the quality of facilities and resources. These two overall judgements reflected the entire school, and were not specific to each phase. However, a separate judgment for the quality of teaching was provided for each phase, and therefore this was the most appropriate indicator of the quality of provision in each phase in a school.

2. The quality of outcomes: The performance of a school and its main accountability is largely based on its results in standardised tests. In other words, the attainment of children as measured by examination results. In the case of inspections, the triangulation of such examination results with the professional judgement of inspectors based on first-hand lesson observations (Rosenthal, 2003; Schagen, 2006 and Hussain, 2015), reporting their findings in the form of a quality judgement. Such judgements alone are not comprehensive findings for summarising all aspects of students' learning and development; but they do provide an indication, albeit a limited one, about students' general acquisition of expected information and skills, and are a basic indicator of reasonably successful teaching. I am not implying a direct correlation between student outcomes and teaching, but rather using one as an indicative tool to the success, or lack of, of the other in light of the largely non-selective process of school enrolments in Dubai. Whereas in some contexts schools have more control over their student selection process, it may be argued, as did Fitz-Gibbon (1990) and Fitz-Gibbon and Kochan (2000), that high examination results are due to the intake of exceptionally able students rather than the exceptional teaching skills of their staff, a point considered when discussing findings.

   Inspection reports recorded judgements on the quality of students' attainment, reported by phase, in five subjects: Islamic studies, Arabic, English, mathematics and science. This study will focus on the attainment results in key subjects, English, mathematics and science as these are widely considered and accepted as core subjects and have long been the focus of researchers when studying the impact of school inspections and is a common practice in literature (Millett and Johnson, 1998; Rosenthal, 2003 and Hussain, 2015). It is important to note that these judgements did not reflect each individual child's attainment results, nor could they be used to make assumptions or generalisations about individual performance.

I obtained the judgements on the quality of teaching, the quality of students' attainment in English, mathematics and science directly from the individual school reports.

The independent variables used in this study were phase specific, the *fees*, *school curriculum*, *phase of schooling,* the *type of school* and the *predominant student passport region*.

- *Fees charged (Fees)*: In 2012/2013 the KHDA website recorded the tuition fees for all grade levels across each private school. This is updated annually, and obtaining fee data from the official website was the most efficient and reliable method, this approach is similar to that of MacDonald (2006). The fees for the last grade level in each phase were recorded in UAE Dirhams (AED). In this study I refer to fees being paid as an indicator of a students' SES, the ability of their parents to pay the tuition fees, as, from a school's perspective, the priority was that the fees were paid within the timeframe set. I based this on the assumption that parents could afford the fees of the schools to which they send their children. For example, if a certain number of children attended a school charging specific fees, then it is assumed that the parents of these children were able to afford/pay the school fees. This may be for example in installments, by loans, upfront full payment or through any or both of the parents receiving full or partial school fees as part of their employer's contractual conditions. Fees are used as proxy for social class, although higher fees do not necessarily mean parents are richer or poorer, but just that they are able to pay the fees.

  The authorised fee price for each phase was determined by using the highest fee charged, usually for the last year of the phase. So, for example Year 6 is the highest grade in primary (phase 2) and its fees were used to represent the fees of the phase. I did not use an average or mean to represent the fees, as this distorted the price, and I wanted data as unadulterated as possible. Six fee categories were created, and the school phases were assigned to one of them. All fees were those charged in 2012/2013. In almost all phases tuition fees increased with age, except in a few non-profit UK curriculum schools. This variable would be the key independent variable that this study would examine.

- *Curriculum (Curriculum)*: In 2012/2013 the main curricula on offer in Dubai were the UK, US, Indian, MoE, IB, French, Pakistani, Iranian, German, Russian, Japanese and Philippines. Considering the wide range of curricula on offer, this study examined the effects of the four main curricula, if any, on the quality of schooling as determined by the quality of provision and outcome.

  The schools reports considered for this study were UK, US, Indian and MoE curriculum schools. These totalled 118 reports, however, only 115 were included in this study. Three new UK curriculum schools were established in 2010/2011. They were inspected for the first time in 2011/2012 and only had one year to address inspector's recommendations. This was insufficient to make improvements and be comparable with the existing UK schools.

- *Phase of schooling (Phase)*: The KHDA reports on the findings of each of the dependent variables by phase. Therefore it was important to consider the schooling phase as an independent variable. There are four official phases of schooling outlined by the KHDA: Kindergarten, primary, middle and secondary schools. Including this variable would allow for the hypothetical comparison between phases to be specific to a particular phase.
  Within the 115 schools the phases were found to be as follows:

Table 4: Number and percentage of phases for all 115 reports per school curricula

	No. of Phase 1	No. of Phase 2	No. of Phase 3	No. of Phase 4	Total
UK schools	45 28%	46 30%	38 24%	29 18%	158
US schools	30 25%	30 25%	30 25%	30 25%	120
Indian schools	20 27%	20 27%	17 24%	16 22%	73
MoE schools	9 26%	9 26%	9 26%	8 22%	35
					386

- *Market type (Type)*: There are three types of schools in Dubai:
    - *For-profit:* these schools were "run by private, profit-generating companies or organisations" (KHDA, 2012e, p.2).
    - *Non-profit*: these schools were "governed by an independent Board with parent representation and from which its shareholders, trustees or any third parties do not benefit financially. Fiscal surpluses, if any, are put back into the institution to further the pursuit of its goals" (KHDA, 2012e, p.2).
    - *Charity schools*: These schools were "a network of bare-bones academies that cater to the children of low-income Arab expatriates, offer afternoon and evening classes for those who cannot afford daytime private education" (Lewis, 2009, p.13).

- *Predominant student passport region (PSPR):* Private schools in Dubai catered to 117 different nationalities with over half of these students from Asia, more specifically the subcontinent (KHDA, 2013d, p.10). The inspection reports recorded the predominant student passport region, but this was school wide and not phase specific. For the purposes of this study, I assumed that the predominant student passport region in each phase was similar to the overall recoded in the reports. The reports were non-specific as to the nationalities that were in each school, and inconsistent in how they were recorded, some reports for example record a specific nationality, such as Emirati or India. Other reports were more general and stated the continent or *passport region*, such as Asian, or Arab. For the purposes of this study I chose to report on the wider classification of passport regions, i.e. Asian, Arab and Western, with Asian including the subcontinent, and Western including all reports that identified a majority nationality that were North American or European. Some may suggest that this was too broad and generalized, and rightly so, however in this case where reports were inconsistent in recording such information, it is almost impossible in the timeframe and setting of this study to determine if reports that recorded 'Arab' as the major nationality and *other* that recorded 'Egyptian', were due to different report writing styles, and if the first report writer decided to use a more generalized approach rather than be more specific as in the second case.

Therefore, all reports that specifically identify a passport nationality were referred to as one of *Arab*, *Western* or *Asian,* as these were the only 3 major nationality groupings across the board of schools.

3.5 Research design

3.5.1 Quantitative and qualitative techniques

Figure 1 below is an outline of the design process: sequential explanatory follow up design: visual model and products of this study (Ivankova et al., 2009).

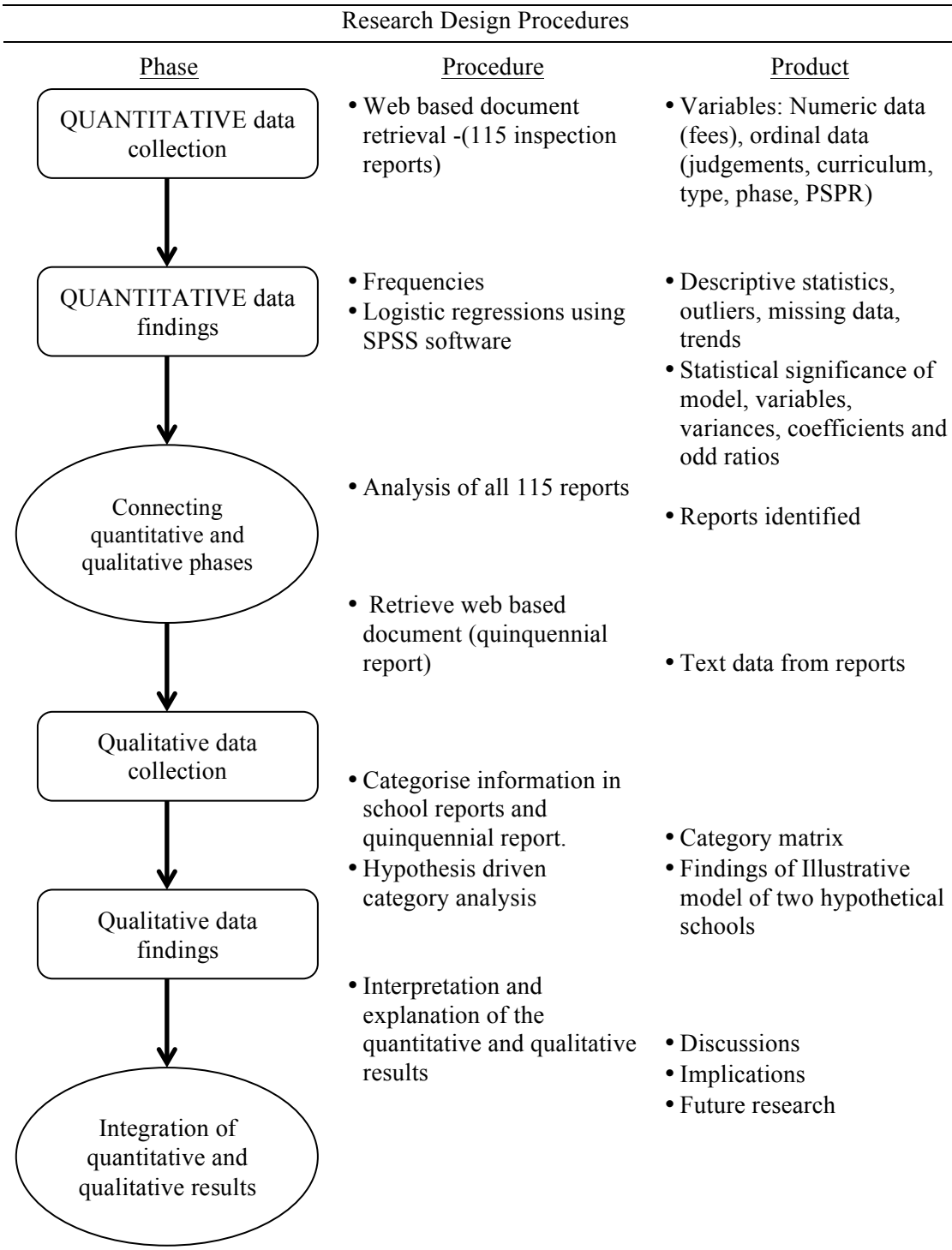

Figure 1: Visual model for sequential explanatory design process. Adapted from (Ivankova, Creswell and Stick, 2006, p.6)

It is clear from Figure 1 that the weight in this study was on the quantitative aspect of the design although the findings were contextualised in the quantitative findings, which allowed me to better understand how they contribute to the study.

3.5.2 Rejected predictive statistical techniques

Prior to deciding to use multiple logistic regressions for the quantitative analysis of data for this study, I explored several alternatives, and rejected each. I will now list these alternative approaches and reasons for rejecting them.

1. *Linear regression*: This was an initial option, as this type of regression is used to determine the presence of a relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. However, one of the conditions of conduction this regression is that the dependent variable is continuous (Stat.yale.edu, 1997; Menard, 2010). This is not the case with the data in this study, as the dependent variable was ordinal.

2. *Ordinal regression* (*cumulative odds ordinal logistic regression with proportional odds* is the most common ordinal logistic regression in statistical software packages such as SPSS): This was the most promising option, as it is used to predict an ordinal dependent variable given more than one independent variable (Kleinbaum and Klein, 2010). For ordinal regression to provide a valid result four assumptions needed to be satisfied (Brant, 1990). Three of the assumptions were satisfied: the dependent variable was ordinal, the independent variables were continuous (fees) or categorical (curriculum, type and PSPR), and there was no multicollinearity. However, the test for parallel lines (Brant, 1990) indicated that the assumption of proportional odds was not met. Indicating that each independent variable did not have an identical effect at each cumulative split of the ordinal independent variables. The findings of separate binomial logistic regressions for each threshold confirmed the result of the parallel lines test; therefore I rejected this regression model.

3.5.3 The research model: logistic regression (binary logistic regression)

I chose a logistic regression since "logistic regression is well suited for describing and testing hypotheses about relationships between a categorical variable and one or

more categorical or continuous predictor variables" (Peng, Lee and Ingersoll, 2002, p.4). It allowed the dependent variable; in this case four separate dependent variables using the same model, to be ordinal dichotomous data (see Figure 1). In other words, it allowed the observations to fall into one of two categories of a dichotomous dependent variable (Pallant, 2005; Kleinbaum and Klein, 2010),

Logistic regression also allows for independent variables to be continuous or categorical; both of which existed in this study. Unlike other regressions, it is generally accepted (Jaccard, 2001) that binary logistic regression does not necessitate that the independent variables must be normally distributed or linearly related (Kleinbaum and Klein, 2010), of which the former is suspected to be present in the data, and was later confirmed with the descriptive analysis.

3.5.4 Quantitative design

Initially I used descriptive statistics to describe and summarise the basic features of the data in this study. This also allowed me to identify any patterns or trends that emerged from the data (Argyrous, 2011).

The logistic model works by predicting the logit of Y from X, where "the logit is the natural logarithm (In) of odds of Y, and odds are rations of probabilities (π) of Y happening … to probabilities (1- π) of Y not happening" (Peng, Lee and Ingersoll, 2002, p.4). With π defined as the probability that the outcome (Y) was present, i.e. was 1, the logistic regression model was:

$$logit\ (Y) = natural\log(odds) = \ln\left(\frac{\pi}{1-\pi}\right) = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_p X_p$$

Therefore,

$$\pi = \frac{e^{\alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_p X_p \alpha}}{1 + e^{\alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_p X_p \alpha}} \quad \text{or,} \quad \pi = \frac{\exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_p X_p)}{1 + \exp(\beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \cdots + \beta_p X_p)}$$

In this model, π was the expected probability, where as X_1 through X_p were the distinct independent variables, β_0 *through* β_1 were the regression coefficients and e = 2.71828 is the base of the system of natural logarithms (Peng, Lee and Ingersoll, 2002, p.4 -5).

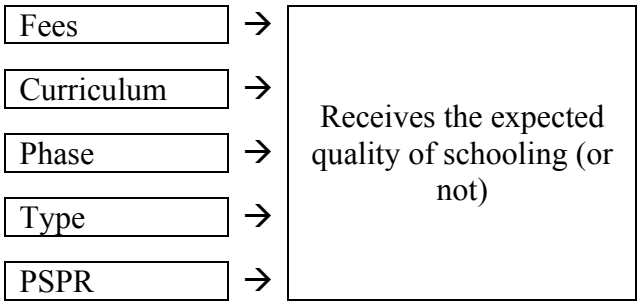

Figure 2: The Research Model

I chose not to use independent variables that were already considered when determining the judgment for the dependent variable, such as other inspection judgments. Other SES variables that are considered influential when determining the quality of schooling, such as household income, student gender, student religion, family size, disability status, level of parents' education, etc. were not considered for this study mainly as these were not directly related to cases (phases), and not reported inspection findings. Should some or all of this information be present to inspectors, they were not reported on and thus not made public. The unit of analysis was the school phase, and these demographic and SES factors were not related to the phase, but rather students.

The goal of this design was to determine the effect of fees on quality outcomes and provision using four different replications of the model for four different dependent variables. This can be conceptualised as taking two hypothetical phases[19] (referred to hence forth as schools) attending the same type and curriculum schools, with the same predominant nationality of students (passport region), but paying different fees, and looking at whether data suggests that one would expect to see a difference in the school quality (i.e. providing a *good* or *outstanding* quality (the expected levels) or an *acceptable* and *unsatisfactory* (below the expected level) quality of schooling. In other words, *would students of a lower socio-economic status be more or less likely to receive a good or outstanding quality of schooling than those of a higher socio-economic status?*

[19] This approach is consistent with others, such as Shields and Masardo (2015).

I used a software package for statistical analysis, SPSS to analyse the data. With the outcome of a logistic regression analysis being dichotomous, the output (dependent variable) was coded as 0 or 1, where 1 indicated that the outcome was present (i.e. results were *good* or *outstanding*), and 0 indicated that the outcomes were not present (i.e. results were *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory*). I conducted a multiple logistic regression for each of the four dependent variables as follows:

1. *Quality of teaching (QTch):* A binary variable indicating whether the quality of teaching was *good* or *outstanding* (coded as 1) or, *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory* attainment (coded as 0).
2. *Quality of attainment in English (QEng):* A binary variable indicating whether students' in a phase received *good* or *outstanding* attainment in English (coded as 1) or, *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory* attainment (coded as 0).
3. *Quality of attainment in mathematics (QMath):* A binary variable indicating whether students' in a phase received *good* or *outstanding* attainment in mathematics (coded as 1) or, *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory* attainment (coded as 0).
4. *Quality of attainment in science (QSci):* A binary variable indicating whether students' in a phase received *good* or *outstanding* attainment in science (coded as 1) or, *acceptable* or *unsatisfactory* attainment (coded as 0).

Independent variables investigated:

1. *Fees charged (Fees)*: A numeric variable indicating the cost of schooling in UAE Dirhams (AED) in units of a thousand, for the end of each phase, i.e. the highest fees charged in a phase.
2. *Curriculum*: The curriculum offered in the phase, this was categorical and consisted of the nine main curricula on offer in the 115 cases, these were the: *UK, US,* and *Indian,* with the *MoE* curriculum considered the reference curriculum.
3. *Phase*: This was ordinal and consisted of the four schooling phases: Kindergarten, primary, middle and secondary.
4. *Market type (type)*: This was categorical and consisted of the four school types: *Non-profit, Charity* and *Embassy*, with the *profit* considered the reference type.

5. *Predominant student passport region (PSPR)*: This was categorical and consisted of the three main groups present in the 137 schools: *Asian* and *Arab* with the reference group being *Western*.

The analysis began with descriptive statistics that summarised key features of the data (Katzer, Cook and Crouch, 1998) and allowed for trends to be identified. These were presented in both charts and tables. Then a series of four logistic regressions were carried out to predict dichotomous outcomes and provide results for the model. Each logistic regression provided information for one of the following dependent variables: the quality of students' attainment in English, the quality of students' attainment in mathematics, the quality of students' attainment in science and the quality of teaching.

3.5.5 Qualitative design

The qualitative aspect of this study aimed at contextualising and explaining the quantitative findings, in addition to answering the following question: *what is the KHDA's perception of fees in relation to inspection findings?*

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe a qualitatiave study as "… an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them." (p. 3). They allow the researcher to give the context of the study consideration when interpreting the meanings and the quantitative findings (Mayring, 2000). According to Creswell (2003, 2007) and Punch (2009), the second phase of an sequential explanatory design should be designed so that it follows from the results of the first phase. In this study the follow-up model will allow me to follow up on specific quantitative findings that may need additional explanation, such as outliers, significant findings and unexpected results (Creswell and Plano, 2007).

Although the use of documents as a main source of data in social research is "not very popular in mainstream social research" (Ahmed, 2010, p.8) and less common than producing questionnaires or conducting interviews (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Yin, 2003; Payne and Payne, 2004), I chose document analysis as the

qualitative aspect of this study, as they are considered invaluable sources of data, and have been propelled to the forefront of qualitative research methods by Scott (1990), Robson (2002) and many others.

The documents used, were secondary sources as they were not the original raw data, but rather were the summaries and findings of inspections across 115 inspection reports and the quinquennial report. I considered these documents to be records as they were formal statements (annual judgements and analysis of quality) prepared by an organisation (the KHDA) to provide an account of an event (school inspections) (Stage and Manning, 2003).

The main advantage of sourcing data from public documents online (Payne and Payne, 2004) was that it provided me with *immediate*, rather than *proximate* (Scott, 1990), access to the 'raw' perceived quality of provision and outcomes in schools as determined by a single regulatory body. This also allowed me to collect the data over non-specific timescale and re-check it for reliability (Scott, 1990) without imposing on any participants.

As is the case with other documents used in research, such as private papers, diaries, census publications and newspapers, the government reports and official webpages I used to source the data for this study were not intentionally produced for research purposes (Scott, 1990). According to Robson (2002) such information only exists because it was gathered, collated and published for another reason. In this case, they were intended as public sources of information regarding inspection outcomes, demographic information about schools and tuition costs. Such documents, as pointed out by Denscombe (2003), were more akin to the interpretation of the 'producers' of the documents, i.e. the inspectors and KHDA civil servants, than an objective presentation of reality. It is therefore important to get an understanding of the activities and information these documents report and summarise, this will be explored later in this chapter.

Documents used as sources of data in research should be analysed with caution, as "documents are not just a simple representation of facts or reality. Someone (or an institute) produces them for some (practical) purpose and for some form of use

(which also includes a definition of who is meant to have access to them)" (Flick, 2006, p.248). Considering these caveats, the findings or information in official government reports are for the most part intended to be factual and presented as truths to the audience, unless otherwise stated. The caution lies with the researcher to be considerate of this when conducting their research. In this case, the KHDA reports were official records and summaries of inspection activities during a specific timeframe (Scott, 1990), and findings were presented as facts for that time and situation. For the sole purpose of this study, I chose to accept these findings as facts in as much as they were factual to the KHDA, but not necessarily an objective representation of reality. I took this approach mainly because I was interested in examining a potential consequence to these findings being accepted as truths, and upon which policies were and continue to be based.

The documents used were published online, they could not be considered permanent, as they could easily be updated, changed or removed, thus, they were semi-permanent (Payne and Payne, 2004; Flick, 2009). Using Scott's distinction, the documents and online sources used in this study were used as *resources* rather than *topics*. By doing so I focused on "what the documents donate about the world" (Scott, 1990, p.36), rather than "an interest in explaining the documents themselves" (Scott, 1990, p.36).

Guest, Namey and Mitchell (2013) suggest two approaches to document analysis: hypothesis-driven and content-driven (p.245). Content-driven analysis, or inductive analysis, allows the text to drive the building of the codes and thematic structure and then the theory from the text is analysed. This approach is best suited to studies where "thematic analysis seek to unearth the themes salient in a text at different levels" (Attride-Stirling, 2001, p.387). On the other hand, the hypothesis-driven or deductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) approach was the approach I adopted for this study (an approach that is consistent with other studies, such as Ribisl et al. (2003)). This approach enables the interpretation of identifiable themes and patterns determined beforehand (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It may be suggested that this was restrictive, as it did not now permit for themes to emerge from the text itself, thus possibly allowing key issues that could have been relevant to the study to be overlooked (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Kondracki and Wellman (2000) and

Mayring (2000), among others, are advocates of allowing the data to provide new insights, and therefore use a thematic approach to analysing text, in which text is coded, themed, sorted and analysed to identify patterns of meaning (Hsieh, 2005). For this study I was not concerned with the entire content of each of the documents, nor at describing a phenomenon that little was known about and therefore I did not use inductive thematic analysis. Rather, I was interested in specific sections of the reports in light of the hypothesis, in order to further explain and contextualise the quantitative results that were significant, non-significant or surprising (Morse, 1991).

Although document analysis was hypothesis driven, and contemplating the caveats mentioned, I did allow for the content to contribute to the study by being non-restrictive and broadening some of the defining themes. The themes or categories were driven from the hypothesis and questions of this study and defined prior to reviewing the reports. Each report was manually systematically scanned for "instances of expressions" (Guest, Namey and Mitchell, 2013, p. 254) of these categories. Categories captured something relevant about the content in the report in relation to the research hypothesis and findings from the quantitative study (Braun and Clarke, 2006)

Document content analysis is primarily a qualitative approach. Yet there are instances when quantitative analysing may also be considered. Rose, Spinks and Canhoto (2014, 2015) state "content analysis can be carried out quantitatively but also qualitatively … it can be used to examine both the manifest and the latent content of a text" (2015, p.1). One instance when quantitative content analysis is used is for descriptive statistics, where "frequency counts, can be used to summarise findings from the sample and appropriate inferential statistics used to test any hypothesis that have been formulated" (Rose, Spinks and Canhoto, 2015, p.5). I used quantitative analysis to create fee categories, based on the fee distribution, and I used frequency statistics of judgements across the different fee categories, to better situate the qualitative analysis of the reports.

Two main types of documents were analysed: 115 individual inspection reports and the quinquennial report of 2012/2013. Below is a detailed account of the process of

analysis of the reports that involved five stages, informed by similar approaches (Breakwell, Hammond and Fife-Schaw, 2000; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The five stage account of analysis:

Stage 1: I started by printing a hardcopy of the inspection reports. Due to my familiarity with most of these schools, I wanted to remove as much bias as possible with regards to the content analysis. I therefore decided to have a second party label the schools and remove all possible identifiable information, such as the name of the school, its location, the name of the principle, etc. This allowed me to deal with schools on an alphanumeric basis only. Inspection reports were labelled using the following format: CUR*nnn* (for example UK101, US009 and IN018), numbers were randomly assigned to schools in no particular order. The second party also recorded on each report the market type of the school (type), the fees for each of the phases in the school (and the fee category as in Table 7), the type of curriculum and the PSPR. This information was primarily for contextualising the findings. A third party was asked to verify the information recorded on each report, and to ensure that no schools were identifiable. I then read each report once to gain an overview and to understand the context of the judgements. I noted any initial thought next to the relevant section.

Stage 2: I re-read each report a second time. In the second reading I identified and colour coded the occurrences of content addressing any of the main themes (mentioned below), and marked any material that fitted into different themes. Occurrences were colour coded as follows: *fees* were coded yellow; *attainment* references were coded green with the letters *E, M, S* to differentiate between the subjects. *Teaching* references were coded blue. For each of the significant findings of the quantitative study schools were selected and examined for contextual information that might contribute to understanding the findings. The main themes were:

- *FEES* - Associations between fees and other factors: I identified all references within the documents to fees, costs, value for money, monitory rewards, fee hikes, tuition fees and prices. In order not to be too restrictive, as the documents may use other terminology to refer to fees, and in order not to confine what the document may associate fees with, I did not limit the factors associated with fees to allow the content to provide insight that may

be missed if I were to be too restrictive. Discussing the quality of schooling in a financial context is not an unfamiliar practice. ADEC reports in Abu Dhabi (ADEC, 2013) and Ofsted in the UK (The Key, 2015) evaluate the financial management of schools, thus giving some indication to parents to how the finances are being deployed within a school.

- *PROVISION* – I identified any occurrences of explanations or justifications for variances in the quality of teaching.
- *OUTCOMES* – I identified any explanations or justifications for variances in students' attainment in English, mathematics and science between phases, groups of students, different curricula, different fee ranges of schools or other differential factors that may emerge in the content of the reports.

Stage 3: Fee categories were created (see Table 7) and inspection reports were categorised accordingly. This allowed me to contextulaise the findngs of the themes within a particular fee range. Once I identified the occurances of the themes within the report, each report was photocopied and the different sections removed and placed into the relevant theme stacks. However, to make sure I could trace them to the original document I noted on each section removed the original school coding: these were then photocopied (if a section was found in more than one category).

Stage 4: The report sections in each stack were read several times, this allowed me to interrogate the content and ask questions about: what were the reports conveying with regards to the category/theme? What were the main trends/reasoning emerging?

Stage 5: I extracted quotes from the raw data (documents) to provide evidence for each category. I related each of the extracts and the overall findings of the analysis of the categories back to the main research hypothesis and questions and relevant literature for the discussion.

The other main document I used for the quantitative study was the quinquennial report. I followed the same previous five stages of analysis for this report. In summary, I printed the report, read it once for an overview, and then identified the sections of the report that were relevant to this study. Paragraphs that contained

information on the identified categories were coded and their content summarised. Findings from these summaries were then used to explain and contextualise the quantitative data. I focused on findings that contributed to understanding the KHDA's perception of fees in relation to inspection findings.

Using documents as a source of data had its drawbacks. Firstly, these documents were "noninteractive and nonreactive" (Stage and Manning, 2003), unlike interviews and focus groups, where the researcher could interact with the participants and develop a discussion or query a meaning, "documents are silent" (Stage and Manning, 2003). Secondly, the reports were produced for a specific time and for a specific purpose (Flick, 2009), and attempting to 'interrogate' them would probably be disconnected from the purpose for which they were created. Finally, as the documents were online, it would have been easy for the content to be updated, changed or deleted (Fielding, Lee and Blank, 2008).

3.6 My position as a researcher

My interest in the topic of this study originated from my participation in the school inspections in the GCC region, more specifically in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar. There is a dearth of academic research or official reports on this topic in that region, and published facts almost always appear to be overly positive, ambiguous or misleading. The trend of linking school fee hikes to inspection results is a growing phenomenon in the GCC region. Fee hikes are rewards for schools that do well in inspections. As a regular consultant to these governments on setting up, implementing and conducting school inspections, this phenomenon concerns me. Schools judged to be lacking in quality are penalised by either fee freezes or insignificant fee increases, and the better performing schools are permitted large increases in their fees. It is my aim to explore the consequences of this education model in a neoliberal context for expatriates, and the question of access to *good* or better schooling by expatriate students in Dubai.

Currently I am a graduate student and independent educational consultant, but my perspective as an inspector informed this research. I no longer have any formal or informal ties with the KHDA or the DSIB. During my years as an inspector, I was not only involved in the initial set up, but in conducting, reviewing and quality

assuring inspections. I was involved in the production of both the English and Arabic versions of the school inspection reports and annual reports. I have first-hand knowledge and experience of the processes involved, their advantages and limitations. In addition to leading over 50 school inspections, I was a team member in over 200 inspections, attended around 1,800 lessons, and in almost every inspection I analysed opinion surveys of parents, senior students and teachers. I personally interviewed thousands of parents, students and board members, hundreds of teachers, and dozens of school leaders. Although I have had first hand experience of inspection activities, I did not participate in all 760 school inspections during the first five years, (only those enumerated above) but I have come to know the nature of inspections from much first-hand experience and the different inspection reports made available to me. These reports provided a huge empirical basis for the first five years of operation. I am fluent in English and Arabic (spoken and written), and have lead the production of the inspection framework in Arabic, the individual school reports, annual reports, and the five year retrospective report.

This study was partly informed by my experience as an inspector to provide insight into the inspection process and contextualising findings. This insight is useful to set the context of the inspections as case studies and to link the research to my current field of work. I subscribe to the views of Strauss (1987), Reason (1994) and Marshall and Rossman (2015): that the experiences of researchers are a valuable resource not to be ignored in research. Reason (1988), in acknowledging the value of researchers' insight, emphasised the need for "critical subjectivity" (Reason, 1988, p.12), and thus not impose my own assumptions and values on the research, but rather use my practical experience and insight to inform this study.

3.6 Ethical considerations

All research must conform to ethical standards (May, 2001 and Silverman, 2005). More specifically, qualitative research that directly involves humans and not inanimate objects (Wellington, 2000) must conform. This study was mainly informed by publicly available government data and reports published on-line concerning the quality of schooling in Dubai and school fees and it may be considered a form of internet-based research (McKee and Porter, 2009). Markham and Buchanan (2012) referred to this kind research as "internet research" (Markham and Buchanan, 2012,

p.2) and DeLorme, Zinkhan and French (2001) describing the same phenomenon, coined the term "online-research" (DeLorme, Zinkhan and French, 2001, p.272) all referring to a similar research practice: using the Internet as a core part of a researcher's work; be it data collection (i.e. online questionnaires, surveys, on-line interviews and document/text analysis), studies of behaviour online or marketing and social media. Eynon, Fry and Schroeder (2012) argued that the use of modern technology as part of qualitative research in the social sciences is a growing phenomenon, as it "has emerged as a major data resource for social science research" (Eynon, Fry and Schroeder, 2012, p.284). Consequently, the traditional ethical considerations of research have been brought into question and revisited in light of the commonplace use of the Internet, its evolving nature and use.

This study did not involve human participants nor did it employ the use of research tools to collect primary data directly from people. It did not use questionnaires, interviews, discussion groups or surveys to collect personal, confidential or sensitive data. Neither did it access publically available data on personnel that may be found on blogs, personal websites, discussion boards or online social media. This study was restricted to on-line government publications that allow the use of their published information; this is stated in the copyright pages of the documents used. The quinquennial report of 2013, states that,

> "In the interests of enhancing the value of the information contained in this report, you may download, print, reproduce and distribute any material contained in the report so long as KHDA is acknowledged as the source." (KHDA, 2013a, p.7).

This study relied on findings and factual claims and it did not access primary inspection data, therefore the concerns posed by DeLorme, Zinkhan and French (2001) surrounding the use of primary data for secondary analysis were avoided. I acknowledge that the inspection data and information used in this study were extracted from KHDA school reports and annual reports and are cited accordingly. Where reports named schools or personnel, all such data was eliminated. No school or person may be identified by this study. The confidentiality of schools and personnel is guaranteed. Data storage was not a concern, as all the data used was publically available and may be accessed by others.

3.7 Time and duration of the study

This study began in December 2013 and was completed in February 2015. Large proportions of time were spent reading, coding and analysing the individual reports, as this was a manual process. Time was also spent investigation the most appropriate quantitative method for analysing the data, as was discussed earlier.

3.8 Validity and reliability of the study

The *validity* and *reliability* of a study are terms related to both the accuracy and trustworthiness of the research (Wellington, 2000; Denscombe, 2003). Validity is concerned with examining if the data measured what it was intended to have measured. The data used in both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the study were used to answer at least one of the questions. The document based approach of this study did limit the ability to triangulate and externally validate the data from other sources. However, the producers of these reports had a monopoly over the contents, therefore including input from other external sources to validate the data would not have contributed to validating the findings.

Scott (1990) suggested four assessment criteria that could be used to check the quality of the 'evidence' in documents. These 'validity' checks are similar to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) 'trustworthiness'. These criteria were based on the notion that documents were socially situated products. The criteria are: authenticity, credibility, representativeness and meaning.

1. Authenticity: "Is the evidence genuine and of unquestionable origin?" (Scott, 1990, p.6)

   The inspection documents were secondary sources of evidence on the quality of schools, produced by inspectors during an inspection. These were based on both primary and secondary evidence evaluated and summarized during an inspection. The annual reports (including the quinquennial report) were secondary, as it was a summary of four previous annual reports and 147 individual inspections. These documents were all government issued; dated, and named senior officials were listed on the documents. Although these listed officials may not have contributed directly to the writing of the reports' text, as the common practice is for this to be conducted by approved civil

servants (Mogalakwe, 2009), they endorsed the findings and authenticated the document. The documents were located on the official KHDA website and there was no evidence during the time of this study, that any changes or updates were made to these documents.

2. Credibility: "Is the evidence free from error and distortion?" (Scott, 1990, p.6)
   The documents used were prepared independently and beforehand, and were not 'staged' for this study.

3. Representativeness: "Is the evidence typical of its kind, and, if not, is the extent of its untypicality known?" (Scott, 1990, p.6)
   Professional and experienced school inspectors and consultants were involved in producing the documents. The reports represented the quality of schooling across all private schools in Dubai.

4. Meaning: "Is the evidence clear and comprehensible?" (Scott, 1990, p.6)
   This is more complex, as to ascertain meaning the researcher has to "apply an understanding of the social and political context in which it has been written and what the author(s) hoped to achieve through its publication" (Cordeaux and Wilkinson, 2000, p.27). The meaning of the reports are conveyed by the language used, these meanings could be taken at face value (Scott, 1990), in which case they are reconstructed for their significance to be understood. Alternatively, the meanings could be interpreted in the context within which the reports were produced (Scott, 1990). Both will be considered when analysing the reports, by situating them in theoretical context of Chapter Two.

The reliability refers to the degree to which the results are trustworthy and could be replicated (Robson, 2002). Outlining how the study was conducted does not necessarily guarantee that others replicating the work would arrive at the same conclusion; however it does increase the degree of reliability. The inspection reports and quinquennial reports are still available online, alongside other inspection reports for these schools (older and more recent reports), accessing such data for replication

purposes is possible. However, the data concerning the fees for the timeframe of this study are no longer available, as they have been updated with the most current fees. Nevertheless, a replication of this study could be conducted with other sets of data.

Summary

This Chapter set out the design and implementation of the study. In the next Chapter I will present my findings and discuss them. A briefly discussion and critique of inspections is presented in Appendix 1, as they were the process by which the data set used for this study was produced and provide an account of the results of the study followed by an analysis and discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will present and discuss my findings for the study, starting with the quantitative study followed by the qualitative aspect of this study.

4.2 Review of the aim

The overall aim of this study was to examine the extent to which students of lower socio-economic status have access to *good* or *outstanding* quality of schooling within the private fee-charging sector. The main hypothesis is: *in the absence of government funded schooling, students who attend higher fee charging private schools are more likely to receive better quality schooling that those who attend lower fee charging schools.* The subsidiary questions are:

1. *How do different factors affect the odds of students receiving good or outstanding quality schooling?*
2. *What is the KHDA's perception of fees in relation to inspection findings?*
3. *To what extent does the definition of quality as outlined in the Inspection Framework affect different curricula schools attaining good or outstanding schooling?*

I used a two phased approach with data extracted from 115 inspection reports and the 2012/2013 quinquennial report for the study. I based this study on the assumption that the qualities of schools as defined by inspection judgements were moderate socially constructed facts, with the reality of quality as outlined by the KHDA having more validity than others, and consequently fee hike policies were directly linked to these findings.

4.2 Findings

When presenting findings of a sequential explanatory follow-up design, Creswell, (2003) and, Creswell and Plano (2007) suggest that the presentation of findings for each phase is done separately[20], with the discussion taking place at the end, by combining the findings of both phases of the study, using the findings of the

[20] See Figure 1 in Chapter Three.

qualitative phase to explain the findings of the quantitative phase. I will use this approach for the following sections.

4.2.1 Quantitative findings

4.2.1.1 Descriptive analyses

Before presenting the findings of the logistic regression model, I will first present a summary of the statistics for the variables used in the quantitative analysis. This descriptive analysis allowed me to get a better understanding of the data and thus informed the testing of the model and the interpretation of findings.

Summary statistics

The summary in Table 5 provides an overview of the data. It shows the statistical frequencies of the variables and their relevant percentile values, central tendencies (mean) and dispersion (standard deviation (std. deviation), minimum, maximum and range). The sample of schools selected included the minimum and maximum fees charged in the private sector in Dubai.

Table 5: Summary statistics for variables used in the quantitative analysis

Variable	Summary Statistics (N=386 cases)
Fees	*Maximum*: 102,000 AED - *Minimum*: 1,213 AED Mean: 23,590 AED – *Std. Deviation 19,906 AED* *Range:* 100,787 AED *Percentiles*: *25* (8,156 AED), *50* (16,921 AED), *75* (34,000 AED)

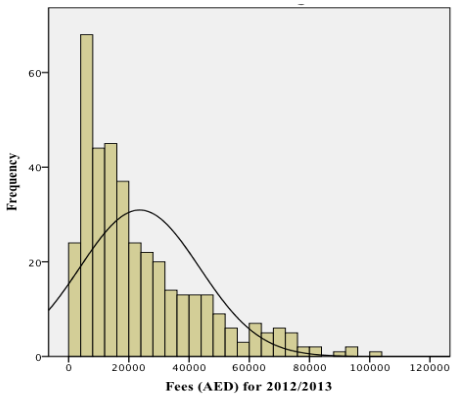

Figure 3: Distribution of fees for 2012/2013

	Type	Frequency	Per cent
Curriculum	UK	158	40.9
	US	120	31.1
	Indian	73	18.9
	MoE	35	9.1
Phase	Kindergarten	104	26.4
	Primary	105	27.3
	Middle	94	24.8
	Secondary	83	21.5
Type	Profit	347	89.9
	Charity	10	2.6
	Non-profit	29	7.5
PSPR	Asian	136	35.2
	Western	82	21.2
	Arab	168	43.5

Figure 4 below shows that outliers (both *out* values as denoted by a small circle and *extreme* values denoted by an asterisk) did exist within the data, but these were primarily located in the US and Indian curriculum schools. The outliers were not a data entry or instrument error (Parke, 2013) but were legitimate fee entries. I kept the outliers as the sample was large, and I expected some values to be outside the upper end of the fee distributions. More importantly, these outliers are key to the study, as they represent higher fees in a specific curriculum.

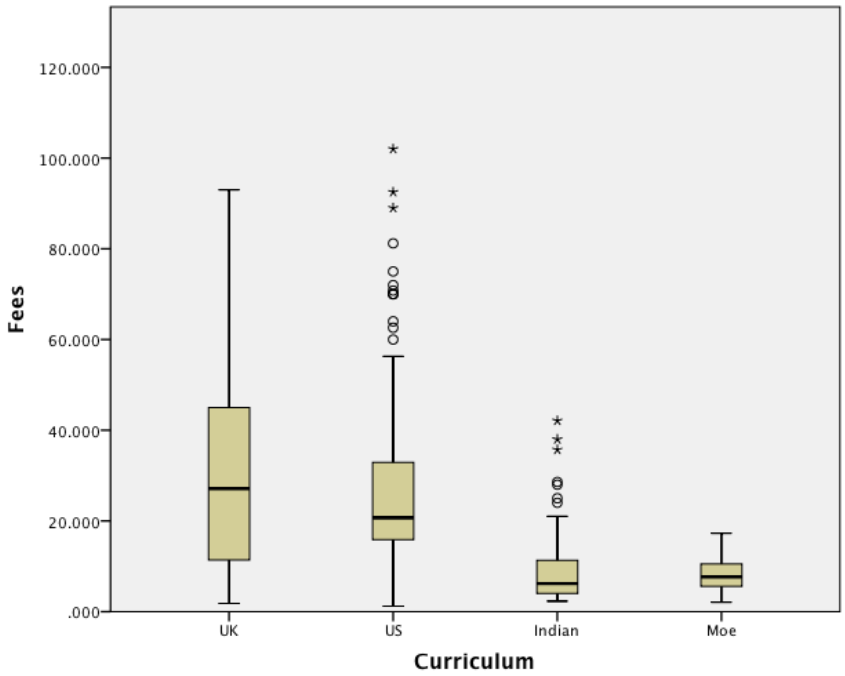

Figure 4: Fees across the curricula

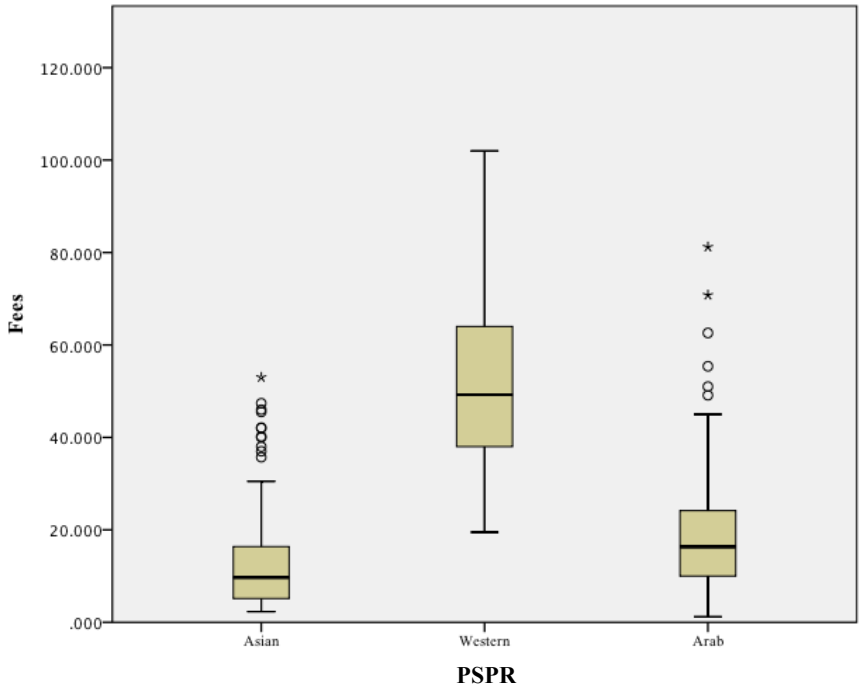

Figure 5: PSPR across the fees

Table 6: **PSPR across the main curricula**

Curriculum		Predominant student passport region (PSPR)			
		Asian	Arab	Western	
	UK	63 (	33	62	
	US	0	100	20	
	Indian	73	0	0	
	MoE	0	35	0	
Total		136	82	82	386 Phases

The descriptive analysis shows that there were relationships within the data. This warranted the question as to *how higher fees contributed to good or outstanding quality across all four dependent variables, controlling for the other variables? What contributing factors are most likely associated with good or outstanding judgements in provision and outcome?* However, addressing these questions was not possibly with the descriptive analysis alone, and this required a move to using the regression model to test the hypothesis.

Frequency of judgements across the curricula

Frequency analysis is used to show the number of occurrences or observations entity selected by the researcher (Katzer, Cook and Crouch, 1998). When this is presented in percentages, it is known as relative frequency analysis, and allows for comparisons (Doty, 2002) and to gain an overview of the distribution of the inspection judgements across the different curriculum by fees. To perceive the frequency of the inspection judgements across the different fees, I created fee categories to simplify references to fees. The frequency of the fee categories reflected the same frequency of phases across the fees (see Figure 3); categorising fees using equal increments would not accurately represent the fee distribution. The most suitable method for categorising the fees (which did not follow a normal or polarised distribution) was to create categories that reflect the natural distribution of the data, with a fixed incremental algorithm. Consequently, I grouped the fees into six price categories as shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Fee categories

Fee Category	Fee range	Multiplies of 5000 Increment next category by
A	Less than AED 5,000 (About GBP 909)	10,000
B	From AED 5,000 to AED 14,999 (GBP 909 to 2,727)	15,000
C	From AED 15,000 to AED 29,999 (GBP 2,727 to 5,454)	20,000
D	From AED 30,000 to AED 49,999 (GBP 5,454 to 9,090)	25,000
E	From AED 50,000 to AED 74,999 (GBP 9,090 to 13,636)	30,000
F	From AED 75,000 to AED 114,999 (GBP 13,636 to 20,908)	

Table 8 below shows that only the UK and US curricula had schools in all four categories, indicating wider range of fees across these schools. The highest fee category F only had 8 phases in total, where as the higher proportion of schools were in fee categories B and C. I used this table as a point of reference to contextualise the text and findings of the reports.

Table 8: Frequency of phases per curriculum across fee categories

	Fee categories						
Curriculum	A	B	C	D	E	F	
MoE	14%	21%	2%	0	0	0	
UK	16%	36%	27%	70%	69%	50%	
INDIAN	65%	24%	11%	5%	0	0	
US	5%	19%	60%	25%	31%	50%	
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	386 Phases

Charts 4 to 7 show the frequency of the four judgement levels, as per inspection reports, on the quality of teaching and students' attainment in English, mathematics and science, in each fee category, in proportion to other judgement levels in that fee category.

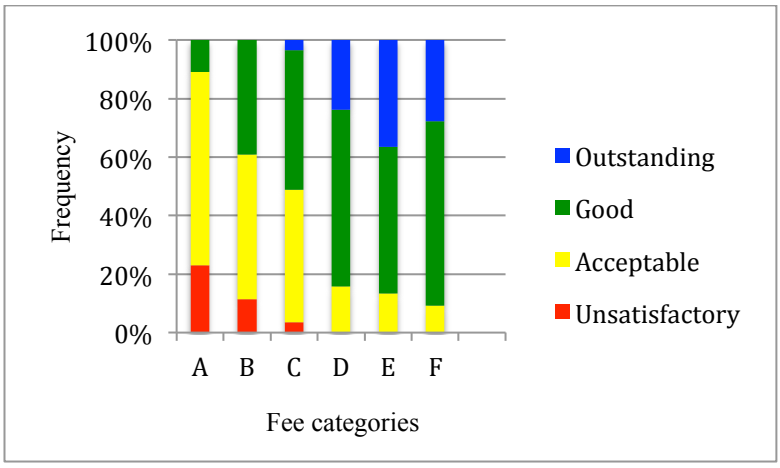

Chart 4: Frequency of the four judgement levels on the quality of **teaching** in each fee category, in proportion to other judgement levels in that fee category

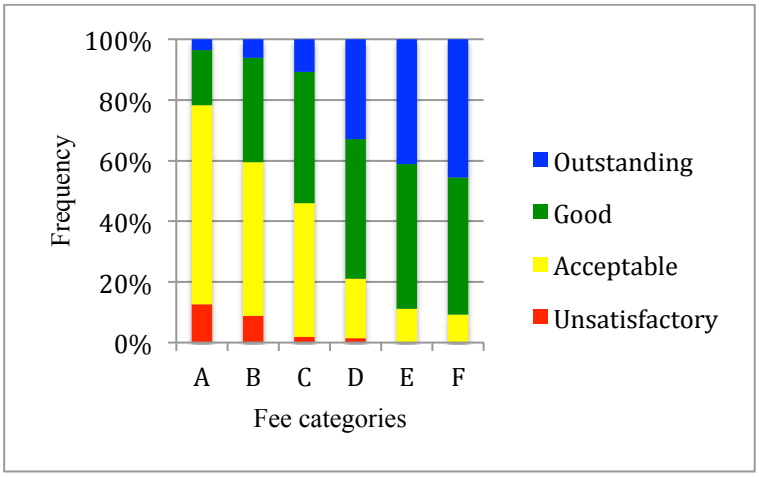

Chart 5: Frequency of the four judgement levels on the quality of students' attainment in **English** in each fee category, in proportion to other judgement levels in that fee category

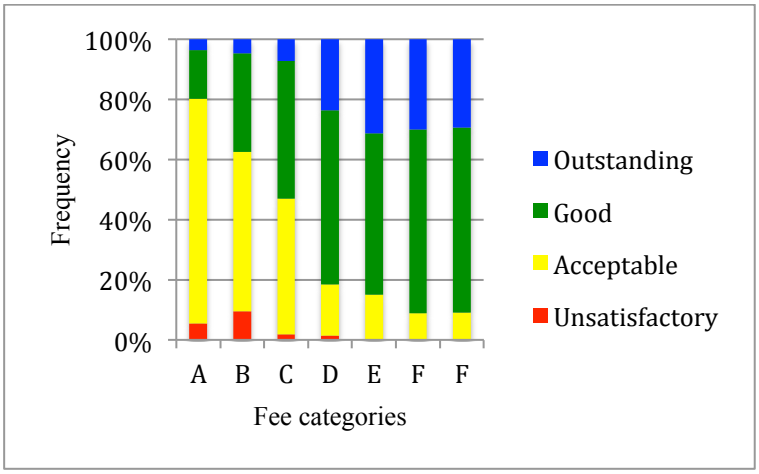

Chart 6: Frequency of the four judgement levels on the quality of students' attainment in **mathematics** in each fee category, in proportion to other judgement levels in that fee category

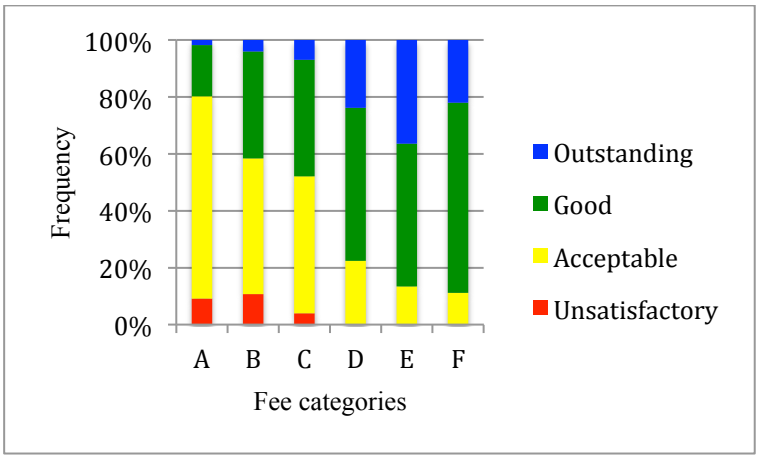

Chart 7: Frequency of the four judgement levels on the quality of students' attainment in **science** in fee category, in proportion to other judgement levels in that fee category

It would appear from the descriptive statistics that relationships existed within the data and fees varied significantly between the four main curricula and across different PSPR.

4.2.1.2 Regression analysis

I used a single model of five independent variables to ascertain their relationship with four separate dependent variables. I conducted a logistic regression using the *Block 1: Method = Enter*, to enter all independent variables at once, to test the extent to which fees, curriculum, phase, type and PSPR were related to the likelihood that students' would attain *good* or *outstanding* in English, mathematics, science and the quality of teaching, when controlling other variables, see Table 6 for results.

Table 9: Model for all four independent variable

	(Y=1) Predicting the students' attainment as *good* or *outstanding* in												(Y=1) Quality of teaching is *good* or *outstanding*			
	English				Mathematics				Science							
	β	SE	*p*	Exp(*β*)	*β*	SE	*p*	Exp(*β*)	*β*	SE	*p*	Exp(*β*)	*β*	SE	*p*	Exp(*β*)
Fees	.024	.012	*	1.028	.039	.012	**	1.040	.025	.011	**	1.025	.046	.013	***	1.047
Curriculum			*				-				*				*	
(UK)	2.132	.921	*	8.431	1.791	.881	*	5.996	2.572	1.108	*	13.086	2.042	.862	*	7.703
(US)	1.803	.876	*	6.070	1.049	.839	-	2.855	1.704	1.088	-	5.496	1.160	.821	-	3.190
(Indian)	2.063	.093	*	7.871	1.902	.954	*	6.700	2.301	1.162	*	9.985	1.741	.933	-	5.705
Phase			-				-				-				*	
(Kindergarten)	-.539	.385	-	.583	-.495	.389	-	.610	-1.02	.374	-	.903	-.570	.375	-	.566
(Primary)	-.568	.375	-	.567	-.952	.391	*	.386	-.021	.370	-	.979	-1.061	.377	**	.346
(Middle)	.073	.378	-	1.075	-.254	.390	-	.775	-.035	.378	-	.965	-.736	.378	-	.479
School Type			-				-				-				*	
(Profit)	-1.085	.954	-	.338	-1.814	.920	*	.163	-2.926	1.151	-	.054	-2.374	.926	*	.093
(Charity)	-.294	1.232	-	0.745	-3.306	1.256	-	-0.036	-2.131	1.215	-	0.118	-.537	1.031	-	.584
PSPR			**				***				***				**	
(Asian)	1.092	.462	**	2.98	1.075	.465	*	2.929	.984	.434	*	2.675	.724	.457	-	2.063
(Western)	2.817	.317	**	16.726	3.185	.819	***	24.178	2.196	.546	***	8.990	2.600	.819	**	13.463
Constant	-.580	.835														

Notes: Exp (*β*) in logistic regression is the change in the odds of students' attainment in English being *good* or *outstanding,* given a unit of change in the independent variable, when all other predictors are constant. ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05. **The reference curriculum was *MoE*, the reference type was non-*profit,* and the reference PSPR was *Arab*.**

Table 9 highlights the significant predictors across the model. Employing a .05 significance level (Tooley et al., 2010; Sheldrake, Mujtaba and Reiss, 2014), three of the five variables were statistically significant across all four dependent variables: school fees, the school curriculum and the predominant student passport region (PSPR).

The coefficient (β) for the variable *fees* was positive across all four dependent variables, indicating an increase in chances of the quality of teaching (provision) and students' attainment (outcomes) as being *good* or *outstanding*. Although the degree of significance for the variable *fees* varied between the dependent variables, with *p* ranging from * to ***, it remained as a whole statistically significant to the model and consistently positive. Controlling for all other variables, the model indicates that for every one thousand Dirhams increase in school fees, the odds of students' attainment (in English (2.8%), mathematics (4%) and science (2.5%)) and the quality of teaching (4.7%) being *good* or *outstanding* increased by a factor ranging from 1.025 to 1.047 or between 2.5% and 4.7%, with the odds of the provision being *good* or *outstanding* higher than that for the outcomes. This finding suggests that when we control for other variables, students who attend higher fee charging schools have higher odds of attaining *good* or *outstanding* outcome judgements and receiving better provision.

Controlling for all other variables, the model also suggests that the odds of students in UK curriculum schools attaining *good* or *outstanding* in English, mathematics and science were respectively almost 8.4, 6 and 13 times higher, than students in MoE curriculum schools. Their odds of receiving *good* or *outstanding* quality of teaching, when holding all other variables, was almost 8 times higher than those in MoE schools. Additionally, compared to the MoE curriculum schools and controlling for all other variables, the odds of the dependent variables being *good* or *outstanding* were also higher for those in Indian curriculum schools followed by US curriculum schools. Therefore, apart from attainment in mathematics, it appears that when compared to students in MoE schools, those in UK curriculum schools have higher odds of being *good* or *outstanding* than those in US or Indian curriculum schools. This suggests that the definition of quality schooling as defined by the Inspection

Framework, was most likely to find in favour of the UK curriculum schools succeeding in achieving *good* or *outstanding* in judgements, leading to increases in fees in these schools, that in return would mean that only those who could afford the higher fees would access the better quality schooling.

Surprisingly, the odds of Indian curriculum schools outperforming US curriculum schools across the four dependent variables (Y=1) was higher, when compared to MoE curriculum schools, and controlling for all other variables. This may be partly explained by the demographics of these schools, as Table 5 indicates that in the US curriculum schools there was a higher proportion of predominantly Arab students than Western students suggesting that the demographic construction of a school and its subsequent culture may contribute to the quality of schooling. This will need to be investigated further in the qualitative analysis. An interesting factor that appeared to statistically influence the model was the predominant student passport region as its significance ranged from $**p$ to $***p$ across all four dependent variables. The findings suggest that, controlling for all other factors, the odds of students in schools with predominantly Western students were respectfully almost 13.5, 17, 24 and 9 times higher at receiving a *good* or *outstanding* quality of teaching and achieving *good* or *outstanding* attainment in English, mathematics and science: indicating that the demographic characteristics of a school may statistically significantly contribute to the quality of schooling. Further information from the quantitative study is needed to explain and contextualise this finding.

On a whole, two independent variables appeared not to be statistically significant in contributing to Y=1: the quality of schooling would be *good* or *outstanding* in respective dependent variables, these were the school phase and type. The type of school only appears to have statistical significance on the model when examining the Y=1 for the quality of teaching. The coefficient (β) for *profit* schools was negative, indicating a decrease in chances of the quality of teaching and students' attainment in science as being *good* or *outstanding* when compared with non-profit schools, holding all other variables. In other words, the odds of students in non-profit schools receiving *good* or *outstanding* teaching, controlling for all other variables, increased almost 11 times than those in profit schools. This finding may support the arguments

encouraging more non-for profit schools in the GCC; this will be examined further in the discussion section.

The main focus of this study is to test the hypothesis: *in the absence of government funded schooling, students who attend higher fee charging private schools are more likely to receive better quality schooling than those who attend lower fee charging schools.* The model used for the logistic regression indicates that the price of schooling, as determined by the tuition fees was statistically significant in determining the quality of schooling for all dependent variables. The schools most likely to be granted fee increases by the KHDA were those that could achieve *good* or *outstanding* results overall. The dependent variables in this model were key QIs used to determine the overall quality of schooling, therefore chosen for the model. The findings suggest that the odds of achieving *good* or *outstanding* increased with fee increases. This suggests that potentially over time, the implication of linking fees to inspection outcomes contribute to widening the gap of access to quality schooling for students of different SES, as indicated by their ability to pay school fees. It also suggests that a students' SES has a slightly larger effect upon the quality of provision than the quality of outcomes. This may contribute to explaining the high demand for private tutoring in Dubai (DSG, 2011). This will be discussed further in this chapter.

4.2.1.3 The model's goodness of fit

I tested the overall significance of the model using the *Model Chi square* in SPSS for all four independent variables, the model was significant with ***$p < .0001$ for each dependent variable, indicating that the model as a whole was able to distinguish between schools in which the quality of teaching and students' attainment in English, mathematics and science were *good* or *outstanding* (Y = 1) and those that did not (Y = 0). The model as a whole explained between 45.3% and 52.1% of the variances in judgement, and the overall correct classification was between 74.6% and 76.6% compared to the *Block 0* of 51% to 53.4%, indicating that there is an improvement using the model (See Appendix 2 for Model Diagnosis).

4.2.2 Qualitative findings

I will first start by describing the main features of the inspection reports and the quinquennial report, followed by the findings.

4.2.2.1 The inspection reports

All 115 reports representing 386 phases were included in the qualitative phase. These were UK curriculum reports, US, Indian and MoE. Collectively these schools had almost 90% of all the private sector students. The reports were roughly 4000 words in length and covered the six KQ. The size of a school, i.e. the number of phases, the languages taught and the number of Muslim children in a school determined the number of QIs judged and recorded in the reports. This study was concerned with the judgements made in QI 1.1 for English, mathematics and science, in addition to QI 3.1.

4.2.2.2 The quinquennial report of 2012/2013

The quinquennial report was the summary report for the findings of the first five years of inspection. It reported on the key trends in the quality of schooling in Dubai and how it has changed over the past four years. It was roughly 40,000 words and included charts and diagrams. It presented the findings for each QI, and sections were dedicated to discussing findings in the main curricula.

The qualitative aspect of this study included a quantitative analysis and qualitative, with the quantitative focusing on frequency of judgements, occurrences of a theme and identifying fee categories for contextualising comparisons between reports.

4.2.2.3 Report findings

I will now present the findings of the individual reports and the quinquennial report with extracts where relevant, following the three main themes of coding:

FEES

Fees were not directly discussed, but alluded to in other ways. I assume this was mainly to do with the format, which was consistent across all reports, and only covered the main QIs. Nonetheless, I assumed that the importance of fees to parents

as part of their main consideration when choosing a school would have warranted some attention with a comment on the value for money aspect of schooling.

The table below indicates the number and type of reference made to fees within the school inspection reports:

Table 10: Reference to fees in school reports

Fees	Number of reports with direct reference to fees	0
	Number of reports alluding to fees	0

By not making direct reference to costs and schooling quality, either in the report or as part of the Inspection Framework, brings into question the sense of reality that is being communicated, albeit communicating by omission.

The quinquennial report, on the other hand, had few direct references to this category. As part of my systematic textual analysis of the reports, I included all of the quotes from the report that make reference to fees are mentioned below.

Table 11: References to fees in quinquennial report

Fees	Number of reports with direct reference to fees	0
	Number of reports alluding to fees	4

These were not in the context of *value for money*, but in two main contexts:
a) *Reasons for choosing a particular curriculum*: In the US curriculum section in the *Best Practices in the United States Schools* section of the report, under the title "*Why do parents in Dubai choose US curriculum schools and what do they think about them?*" (p. 105), it stated:

> *"Parents choose US curriculum schools for a variety of reasons… twenty-six per cent of parents cited the English language as the main reason, and another 23 per cent believed that these schools offered a US curriculum that prepared students … the school's reputation, recommendations by friends, and the school's location were reasons behind a few parents' decisions.*

Other reasons for choosing US curriculum schools included affordable fees." (KHDA, 2013a, p. 105).

This suggests that some parents choosing US curriculum schools, mainly Arab as indicated in Table 6, do so in order to expose their children to the English language, and to obtain a high school diploma increasing their opportunities for higher education in the US, all at what appears to be affordable prices.

b) *Costs and the quality or range of provision:* the report acknowledged that there was an increased awareness amongst some school leaders to invest in improving the quality of provision, such as investing in special education needs (SEN) teachers, and the different approaches taken by schools to cover the costs of extra-curricular activities. The report appeared to present any reference of costs or fees positively, such as:

> *"The value of these assistants in these schools is significant. School leaders recognise that value and invest time and money in training them" (*KHDA, 2013a, p.61)

> *"The curriculum includes quality extra-curricular activities that address the broad spectrum of student interests, at no or minimal additional cost to students." (*KHDA, 2013a, p.110)

From the perspective of social constructionism, there appears to be an attempt on behalf of the authorities to create a positive association between monetary references and provision. This perception of reality presented in such official reports, is most likely to become the official stance on the issue, should it be raised publically.

This approach of creating a sense of reality with regards to how the issue of fees should be addressed is further evident in the following statement regarding hidden fees:

> *"A few parents expressed concern to inspection teams that, once their children were enrolled in school, the school failed to engage them fully in their child's learning. A few were surprised that additional support for their child came with substantial extra financial cost*." *(*KHDA, 2013a, p.55)

This passage suggests that in addition to the tuition fees, some parents were not prepared for extra costs associated with learning, such as providing support beyond the accepted norm. The report failed to take this further or address the concerns raised, the newspaper quotations from chapter one suggest that parents' concern with *the cost of accessing quality schooling* was clearly a high priority for many, and is their perception of the reality of the situation, but this appears not to have been reciprocated in the official documents. This suggests that the authorities may have prioritised other educational aspects over the cost of quality schooling, an issue that one would have expected to have been addressed in some depth in view of the nature of the market-driven private schooling sector. By appearing to undermine the issue of fees and quality of provision, or routinely presenting it positively, the authorities appear to be attempting to create a sense of shared reality (that the inspection findings did not discover issues with the fees and access to quality schooling), and by doing so they would appear to call into question the existence of any other reality other than that which is presented. This account of reality surrounding the issue of *costs and the affordability of quality schooling* as presented in the report is supported by the weight of the authority and its *power*. A point that White and Epston (cited in Van Niekerk, 2005, p. 65) support; that even within a social constructionist stance, "not all goes", and at some point a dominating particular meaning of reality will be imposed and dictated being similar to what appears to be taking place in this context.

PROVISION

Both the individual inspection reports and the quinquennial report had sweeping statements about the proportions of improvement in judgements, and remained silent about who the recipients of the change were, and what schools were the ones not improving sufficiently. All references to provision are quoted in this section with no other references provided in the report. There is little information for parents on the quality of schooling for the fees charged. There appeared to be no accountability for the fees charged given the market-driven context of these schools, again, Comments included:

> *"the quality of teaching and learning in private schools has improved since the first cycle of inspections. Very little of it is now unsatisfactory. Well over half of the judgements for teaching and learning are good and better and the*

proportion of teaching rated outstanding has increased to approximately 10 per cent." (KHDA, 2013a, p. 61).

"the proportions of teaching and learning rated no better than acceptable has remained at more than 40 per cent overall throughout the five year period" (KHDA, 2013a, p,61)

No context was provided in the report for where these judgements occurred in relation to the students most likely to have been receiving this *unsatisfactory* quality of provision. Nor was there sufficient information regarding where the improvements took place, i.e. in what type of school and which students were benefiting from the improved provision. The questions remained: *who is most likely to be receiving the unsatisfactory quality of provision?* It is only once the school fees are known that the reader is able to then contextualise the content.

According to the charts in the quinquennial report, the highest proportion of *good* and *outstanding* judgements in teaching were located in the UK and US schools, followed by the Indian schools. The MoE schools ranked the lowest in the quality of provision. It appears that students in the MoE schools consistently received low quality provision over the five years of inspections. According to Table 7, these schools were in the lower fee categories. Unless the reader was familiar with the Inspection Framework and the descriptors for the quality judgements, the reasons for the poor quality were vague, and the use of the quality terms did not clarify the matter for the reader, such as:

"The quality of teaching and learning in MoE curriculum schools requires urgent improvement. In these schools, the incidence of good quality teaching is currently around 20 per cent. Inspectors did not report any phase of any school as having outstanding teaching. The majority of the teaching in these schools is of only acceptable quality and nearly one in five lessons are still unsatisfactory. Teachers in these schools, typically, do not promote active learning based on students' investigative and problem-solving capacities." (KHDA, 2013a, p. 62)

And,

"Few staff were suitably qualified and professional development did not meet the needs of the teachers" Report MoE028.

Or,

"All staff were highly qualified and regular up-to-date professional development was targeted at individual teachers' needs." Report UK103

Most of the shortcomings in the quality of provision appeared to have been due to the lack of qualified, experienced teachers, and the lack of professional development geared towards the expected quality described in the Inspection Framework. Whereas in the better performing schools, such as UK103, there were highly qualified and experienced staff with regular personalised professional development. According to the fee categories, the US or UK curriculum schools that catered primarily to the Arab community were mostly those in the lower fee bands, and the ones with predominantly fewer native English speaking or Western trained teachers. These schools were also mostly gender segregated, as indicated by the comments in the QI2 section of the reports, such as:

"At the time of the inspection the [US053] school roll was 4,127 students, predominantly Arab and segregated from grade 3 onwards … around one third of the teachers were unsuitably qualified and new to the school … students' attainment in and progress in English was hindered by teachers' poor command of English." Report US053.

Gujarati (2012) and Hofman (2015) agree that the costs of training, supporting and retaining highly qualified teachers are high, but are needed in order to support a sustainably high quality teaching force. An OECD report on teacher shortages states that "looking at the way teachers are distributed among socio-economically more disadvantaged and advantaged schools provides another perspective on the issue of teacher shortages … students in disadvantaged schools tend to have better access to full-time teachers … at the same time disadvantaged schools tend to have fewer teachers with advanced university qualifications than socio-economically advantaged schools … indicating real differences in quality of teaching in more disadvantaged schools." (OECD, 2012, p.58). This appears to be the case in the context of the school reports, where poorer quality teaching is most likely associated with the costs invested in these teachers.

In some of the lower fee Indian curriculum schools, comments indicated that teachers were not employing teaching styles expected in the framework, thus judging it poorly,

> *"A significant minority of teaching was unsatisfactory…questioning remained focused on factual recall and did not promote understanding or active learning appropriately. Teachers mainly used ICT for presentation of facts. They did not regularly facilitate students' use of these resources for critical thinking or independent enquiry-based research opportunities."* Report Ind044

OUTCOMES

Overall, the reports did not yield much information on reasons for different outcomes, they were mainly descriptive in nature, reporting what different proportions of students could or could not do. There were some indicators as to reasons for poorer English attainment judgements, but not much with regards to mathematics and science. Analysing the distribution of the four judgment levels and the context of their reports provided more information than the direct text. I used this approach to help contextualise where the different judgements occurred. All references to outcomes are quoted in this section.

There are no public statistics available on linguistic demographics of students from 2008/2009 to 2012/2013 in private schools in Dubai. The quinquennial report and inspection reports had little commentary about the challenges in learning English in private schools. Although the main language of curriculum delivery in most schools, English was not the native mother tongue of a large proportion of students, as seen in school US053. In the UK and US curriculum schools, most of the reports in which students' attainment in English were *good* or *outstanding* were found in fee categories D to F, and almost all had predominantly Western students. Such as school US057:

> "*[School US057] enrolled 1,665 students ... seventy-two percent of the students were from the United States and Canada ... Emirati students comprised less than one percent of the student population .... All teachers were well qualified and most were experienced in teaching a US curriculum*

.... Children's attainment in English was outstanding across all phases of the school." Report US057

Reports were inconsistent in providing information about the English teachers' native tongue, it tended to be mentioned in schools were students' attainment was *outstanding* or *unsatisfactory*, in a few cases it was mentioned were attainment was *acceptable*, therefore it was difficult to establish how much this influenced students' attainment.

In lower fee charging US and UK schools with predominantly Arab students it was evident that inspectors associated students' attainment to a poor command of English by the English teachers, as illustrated earlier in school US053. However, in the Indian curriculum schools, there did not appear to be any disparity between schools, based on fee categories, with regards to their teachers' command of English, however, students' outcomes appeared to vary depending on each schools' curriculum focus. For example, in some of the Indian schools the focus was on reading, speaking and listening, with little attention to writing, while in other schools there was excessive focus on writing and not enough of reading.

As for the MoE schools, it appears that all these schools existed within the lower and middle fee categories A to C. These schools were predominantly segregated, with students almost exclusively Arab, and few school reports indicate that Western trained staff were employed. Where this was the case, there appears to be a marginal improvement in students' attainment.

Reporting on students' attainment in mathematics, the KHDA's quinquennial report stated "a largely positive overall trend in students' attainment and progress in mathematics is evident across private schools in Dubai. The proportion of outstanding attainment has also increased over the five years of inspections" (KHDA, 2013a, p.46). This appears to be the case in their comparison of proportions of *outstanding* judgements over these first five years of inspection. However, the text and judgements in the individual school reports show that after four years of improvement the *outstanding* judgements for attainment in mathematics are predominantly in the higher fee schools D to F, and located in specific curricula,

mainly the UK. This indicated that any improvements leading to *outstanding* judgements were largely within specific schools. They appeared not to have been wide spread across the private schools in Dubai.

Reasons for different judgements in science were almost exclusively linked to the curriculum. Few references were made to lack of facilities but for the most part the curriculum and teaching styles were predominantly discussed. Across private schools in Dubai the science curriculum was one of the most variant, as different curricula had different standards, expectations and science subjects on offer. The quinquennial report acknowledged this feature and stated "expectations of science education vary from one curriculum to another" (KHDA, 2013a, p. 51). As such, the individual reports were rather inconsistent in their approach to feeding back on students' attainment in science. The areas of science reported on varied significantly between schools, raising questions regarding inter-rater reliability in science judgements. I view this as significant because a large proportion of inspectors were mostly UK trained and experienced, it would therefore not be surprising for them to have used their knowledge of the UK curriculum as a benchmark for assessing attainment in other curricula schools, raising an important question about the validity and objectivity of the judgments.

4.3 Discussion of both quantitative and qualitative findings

This study suggests that the price of schooling may limit parents' access to *good* or *outstanding* quality schooling for their children when the Inspection Framework defines quality. The trends and findings suggest that increments in school fees increase students' odds of *good* or *outstanding* quality of provision and outcomes, when other factors are controlled, and therefore the lower fee schools would be most likely to be those with the *unsatisfactory* or *acceptable* judgments. The practice of weighing up school fees against the quality of schooling is the kind of practice that I would stipulate authorities are counting on parents to do, and fair enough, this is the parents' prerogative. However, the imposed market forces on the private schooling system, as part of the neo-liberal 'set up' within the system, may appear to lead some parents to be egalitarian about access to quality schooling, expecting the private schools to somehow be able to provide the same high quality of schooling regardless of fees charged, from their perspective as paying customers. The parents' comments

would suggest this to be the case, but then why should one expect private schools to behave any differently from other private business that work-within-their-means? Not that I am stipulating that low fees are predicators for poor quality but in this case, they are indicators of it.

I agree with Tooley (Tooley and Dixon, 2006; Tooley, 2009; 2010, 2012) that parents have a choice for their children's education in any schooling system, with parents in some of the poorest countries forgoing low quality public schooling in search for better low-fee private schools, but when parents exercise choice within an exclusively fee charging context, and they are non-citizens, the findings of this study suggest that at some point sooner if not later, their choice is going to be fee dependent; suggesting that quality is most compromised when the parents have less options to choose from.

The expectation set out by Vision 2021 that first-rate education would be accessible to all students, is not supported by the findings of this study. Rather, this study suggests that compared to private MoE schools, with predominantly Arab students, it is most likely that UK curriculum schools, with predominantly Western students, are most likely to access the better quality schooling. The demographic and fee variance between schools appear to be factors that effect access to better quality schooling. This raises concerns about the mechanism used to define quality within schools, and indicates that the social construction of quality schooling, as stipulated by the authorities, may not be encompassing factors considered important to other *social constructs* of quality schooling, thus leading to a perceived bias in accessing the better quality schooling. The trend of improvement according to the KHDA, as outlined in their quinquennial report supports this notion, it stated

> *"In UK curriculum schools, the overall trend is one of improvement… in all phases with increases in the proportions of outstanding and good ratings. In US curriculum schools [the quality] have remained static. … In MoE and Indian curriculum schools, the proportions of good … have declined"* (KHDA, 2013a, p. 62)

And,

> *"Of the different types of private schools in Dubai, those providing a UK*

> *curriculum continue to offer the best overall quality of education to their students. The largest number and highest percentage of outstanding and good schools offer a UK curriculum, which has been the case in each of the last five years. The proportion of UK schools in Dubai rated outstanding and good overall increased in each of the last five years, while the proportion rated acceptable and unsatisfactory decreased."* (KHDA, 2013a, p. 83)

And,

> *"Schools offering a US curriculum have remained almost static in terms of overall performance, although one is now rated outstanding. Private schools that offer the MoE curriculum have shown no real improvement in overall performance since the first cycle of inspections in 2008-2009. A significant proportion of these schools still offer an unsatisfactory quality of education and almost all are rated no better than acceptable"* (KHDA, 2013a, p. 83)

Unfortunately, the expectations of the Inspection Framework may predispose the schools already working with its paradigm of expectations, approaches and pedagogical preferences, all of which may indeed be internationally accepted as best practice, to accomplish high judgements. Those schools that work within different or even opposing paradigms of expectations, approaches and pedagogical preferences such as the Indian school or the US schools (where for example assessment strategies vary significantly from the UK style), may struggle to rank high on the inspection outcomes. To assume that the locally produced Inspection Framework, which is based on the Ofsted framework and judgement method, is the standard that defines levels of quality inherently would also assume that all the different contexts, curricula, philosophies and practices in the varied international schools systems in Dubai have an agreed or similar understanding of each of the KQs and QIs. Who is to say that the *one model fits* all approach of using an Ofsted inspired Framework for all school systems in Dubai is the most effective or consistent way of assessing the quality of schooling in its diverse settings? In other words, the locally produced Inspection Framework, although aligned well with accepted school performance and education quality indicators, is also strongly embedded in national aspirations and social priorities, that may or may not be viewed as objectively representing *good* or better schooling quality. In fact it may not even objectively represent that which is considered as *unsatisfactory* or *acceptable* quality

I will use two examples to illustrate such concerns with the Inspection Framework. Firstly, the quality of teaching in the Indian curriculum schools: The quinquennial report and school reports of Indian curriculum schools, show that Indian teachers' planning often did not value interactive learning, tactile learning, differentiated tasks or teaching to meet the needs of the range of student abilities. These were the main aspects of teaching that were expected in the Inspection Framework in Quality Indicator 3.1. This is predominantly a Western paradigm for effective teaching. It is highly contextualised to social expectations, political agendas and *Western* education policies. Assuming that one pedagogical style among many is worthy of being the benchmark against which all others will be judged poses questions about its validity. The teaching and schooling paradigms of other culture's schools operate within their national curricula. Parents from the home country may seek authentic 'back home schooling' to make transitions home possible. They are buying the whole schooling package; their Indian culture, the Indian schooling expectations, the Indian curriculum standards, even the religion and beliefs of the school community. Practices in these schools may not align with the descriptions and expectations of school quality as outlined in the Framework. In this apparent clash of paradigms, the Indian schools suffer from the imposition of Western values about what makes good teaching. Such is the case with the non-Western curricula schools.

Another illustration is the quality of provision and outcomes versus parental preferences in the MoE private schools. My findings suggested that the quality of teaching and students' attainment in the UK, US and Indian schools were most likely to be better than the MoE private schools when controlling for other factors. The dearth of *good* or *outstanding* judgments and the dominance of the poorer judgements were, according the KHDA individual reports, due to poor management, poor quality teachers and a weak curriculum. In sum, inferior schooling experiences for Emirati students. Nonetheless, the quinquennial report and individual school's reports showed that a majority of these parents were satisfied with the schooling their children receive, such as

> *"Most of the parents who responded to the survey thought their children made good progress in the key subjects ... the majority of parents thought their children enjoyed school and almost all parents and students thought*

that teaching and learning were good and that they had a good understanding of Islam." MoE011

This was a segregated MoE private school with predominantly Arab students. It was representative of almost all MoE private schools. One of its main aims was to create a learning environment that promoted Islamic and cultural values, and therefore would presumably attract parents prioritising such context for the education of their children, and I would assume that the fees were affordable for parents. The report suggests that parents were largely satisfied with the school, and yet inspectors judged all aspects of provision and outcome as *unsatisfactory* or *acceptable* at best. The parents' beliefs about quality schooling and what constituted a *good* varied significantly from those of the KHDA. The report stated that the children were not being exposed to certain styles of teaching or assessment, but this did not make the experience less valuable for parents or their children. Some may argue that parents do not always know best, and should trust the expert opinions on school; the majority remain satisfied nonetheless.

There is little information available regarding parents' perspectives on the usefulness of the school reports or the Inspection Framework, but the quotations in Chapter One would suggest there is a demand not only for better quality provision across all fee school ranges, especially those who can afford less, but also for access to better quality schooling. I largely agree with Tooley's view, that although information is provided to the public (parents, educators, investors and policy makers), in this case about the quality of schooling, this is "not market-driven information" but rather information that is "imposed government bureaucracy" (Tooley, 2010, p.110). Parents continue to send their children to the *acceptable* and *unsatisfactory* schools, even after five years of inspection results, suggesting that both (or either) the low fees of such schools and the context of schooling may be of a high priority, assuming that parents will buy the best schooling they can afford for their children. Weighing school fees against the quality of schooling is a consideration for many parents, but the authorities in their school inspection reports and annual report provide little information regarding access to quality schooling. It is rather surprising that there is very little analysis or discussion about access to quality schooling.

In addition to the socio-economic challenges, this study suggests that school's market type did appear to have some effect on the quality of schooling, when controlling for other factors. Table 9 shows that both charity and profit schools were both negatively related to *good* or *outstanding* judgements in the quality of provision and outcomes, indicating that the better quality schooling was most likely to be not-for-profit schools. This does not, however, suggest that school which priorities profit making and gaining financial returns, are less able to provide *good* or *outstanding* quality schooling. Biggs (2014) proposed that non-profit schools are grounded in a philosophy that focuses on serving the needs of the community, and in contrast to schools that prioritise profit making, these schools offer parents more access to better quality schooling. Some aspects of my findings suggest this is not always the case, some profit-oriented schools although market driven may only require enough students to maintain their profit. I am not advocating this, but merely pointing out that there are schools that appear to capitalise on providing the cultural aspects of schooling prioritised by parents at affordable prices, despite judged as *unsatisfactory* or *acceptable* by KHDA standards, they are still functioning schools with what appears to be a sufficiently satisfied clientele.

4.4 Limitations of the study

There are several limitations to this study, some concerned with the literature review, and others with the methodology. I will present the limitations in three sections:

1. Literature review: I included the use of media resources such as national newspapers and national websites as sources of information and policies when informing this study. This is not an uncommon practice by those conducting research in the Middle East, and in the GCC more specifically, as "the media in the Middle East is an important *mode of information education*" (Bradley, 2010, p. 107). Information in the local government affiliated media is considered factual and includes government statements and official announcement (Biggs, 1995), some of which were referenced in this study.

2. Methodology: The data I collected for this study exclusively focused on government findings recorded online in the form of inspection reports and annual reports. Access to schools in the region is challenging and many are often unwilling

to engage or participate in private research (Bradley, 2010). This conservative nature combined with the focus of this study on the official perspective of the notion of quality schooling, may have led to a restrictive approach of only using documentation as the qualitative aspect of this study. However, it is my view that interviewing civil servants or authority official would have been, at this stage, tautological.

3. Analysis: The analysis was done by myself, and may therefore be subject to what Wellington (2000) describes as "observer contamination" (p.16). However, I prefer to view it not as contamination, but rather as contextualisation, and hold the view that, although qualitative analysis is value laden since it is interpreted by people, it is the experience of the people that add value to the research and interpretation of the findings Strauss (1987).

4.5 Summary

This study is not about predicting educational outcomes based on SES indicators, nor is it about establishing a cause and effect correlation. Rather it is about establishing the quality of schooling most likely available to students based upon a key indicator of SES, the affordability of school fees. This study indicates that parents who pay more are more likely to access higher quality schooling for their children. It also suggests that the evaluation tool and subsequent policies may be contributing to widening the gap of accessing quality schooling.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Review of the conceptual focus and conclusions of this study

According to the World Education News & Review (WENR, 2014), the UAE ranked number one on the Top Host Countries for English-Language International Schools in 2013, with Dubai named as the top host city. Out of the 19 named cities, five were GCC cities, and two from the UAE. This indicates that the GCC countries host a substantial number of private schools in relation to their small population sizes, when compared with other countries or cities on the lists. This context has created an unusual schooling arrangement that may potentially affect over 3.7 million students in the region.

The conceptual focus of this study is to contribute to literature on access and choice within a market driven private schooling sector in a neoliberal context where access to public schooling is limited, and almost exclusive, to indigenous citizens. Therefore, this research inquiry contributes to the study of education, markets and social equality by isolating the model of private schooling (as is the case in Dubai and other GCC cities) from discussions regarding the processes of privatisation in education, and locating it in a context within which parental choice shifts from the "meritocratic competition to a largely private competition between families based in some measure on wealth" (Wu, 2008, p.599). Unlike the context of Wu's studies, this context is one in which choice is limited to paying for the best affordable education in the absence of public options, due to the commoditisation of education within the idiosyncratic neo-liberal context. This study also supports the concern raised by Lauder *et al.* (1999) that "educational opportunities will become polarised, just as income ha[s] been polarised" (p.31). In their studies, both Chow and Yan (2006), and Dai *et al*. (2004) show that income affects the demand for private education versus public, and consequently inequalities in income are inevitably reflected in educational inequalities. This study suggests that this is potentially even more so in a context where schooling is exclusively a commodity of the private sector and is subjected to external governmental accountability that may appear to

prefer one paradigm of education over another. The findings of this study suggest that the inequalities of access to what is believed to be *good* or *outstanding* schooling are primarily influenced by the costs of schooling represented in the fees charged. The market context, within which private schools in Dubai and other GCC cities operate, is one where private schools depend fully on their revenues from both tuition and hidden fees, in order to compete with other schools, some of which may be on course to monopolise schooling in the private sector, as may be suggested about GEMS schools. Consequently, the socio-economic school segregation (Valenzuela, Bellei and Ríos, 2013) by fee charging market-oriented private schools may potentially prove to have undesired effects on educational opportunities and access to good quality schooling. This is a point that Allen (2013) suggests critics are quick to argue, in that "higher-income families benefit at the expense of the poor, because they are advantaged in their ability to exercise choice" (Allen, 2013, p.29). Allen finds that the current admission system in schools in England reinforces social schooling stratification, in that the wealthier families are more able to access the better schools through "house moves" (Allen, 2013, p.31), and thus as suggested by Gibbson et al (2013), schools that rank highly on national league tables contribute to raising house prices in relation to those schools lower down the league tables. Although no study has been conducted in the GCC to examine the applicability of this within the private school context, it is fair to presume that the findings of this study may suggest that this form of social mobilisation is likely to take place in as far as accessing private schools is concerned. Yet, some may argue that if parents pay for the best quality of schooling they can afford, then within a relatively accessible city such as Dubai, where almost all schools are accessed by school buses, the metro system or by private transportation (KHDA, 2015a), some parents may chose to spend less on housing and live in relatively cheaper areas in order to be contribute more financially to the school fees.

The phenomenon of schools being more segregated financially in relation to the neighbourhoods in which they are located in is not a new one, as Allen (2007, 2014) points out. Suggesting that choice in schooling, particularly in the market driven private sector in the absence of government schooling, is a complex process within which equal access to *good* or better quality schooling is most likely to be primarily fee based. Indicting that families only able to afford the lower fee schools, are most

likely to be limited in their choice and access to the better quality schooling for their children. When access to *good* or better quality school is largely determined by parental ability to pay the school fees, one could consider the relationship between schooling and social mobility in terms of equal opportunities. In other words, examining the "balance of opportunities available" (Ward, 2013, p. 22) to the neo-liberal subsection of society within the GCC, could suggest that social school stratification by school fees may have an effect on social mobility in terms of movement of students between same fee category schools and the demand for such schools, that according to inspection outcomes, are of poor quality.

Both school fees and the passport region are SES aggregates that appear to be the social currencies largely determining the capacity of parents to purchase quality schooling. Similar to the notion that "job-holding is the most important social and economic role held by most adults outside their immediate family our household" (Hauser *et al*., 1996), in turn, from a student's perspective the school they attend is potentially the most important social and economic position they hold outside their house. The school a child attends would potentially define the parameters of the child's SES, the social circle within which the child moves in school, and the likely outcome of schooling.

To conclude, in the *Private School Landscape Report 2012-2013* the KHDA stated that

> *"Nearly half (45 per cent) of the students at private schools in Dubai pay less than AED10,000 per year in tuition fees, while some 16% pay more than AED35,000 dirhams."* (KHDA, 2013d, p.17). It also stated *"the average tuition fee paid by a student at a private school in Dubai is AED 18,196 per year"* (KHDA, 2013d, p.17).

One might approve that a significant proportion of students were able to afford what was considered to be *reasonably* low fees, however, this study suggests that it is most likely that these students would be the ones without access to what is considered by the authorities as the *good* or *outstanding* quality of provision and outcomes. Bouhlila found that the Heyneman-Loxley effect was not fully supported across most of the MENA region, and a lack of data from Dubai made it difficult to

determine which most likely affected student outcomes. This study contributes to the discussion about the effects of children's SES upon their schooling experience. It demonstrate using official government publications, that children of a higher SES are more likely to receive *the better* quality schooling, as outlined by the authorities. In contrast, children whose parents can only afford a lower school fees are most likely to receive an *unsatisfactory* or *acceptable* quality schooling, both of which are below the authority's expectations.

Gee (2004) states that words are meaningless unless they are socially situated, and thus the four quality judgement terms hold particular meanings in their context. They also represent a government intervention in private businesses and carry significance and consequences for all stakeholders. These consequences are not usually positive for the children and have not levelled the playing field. Inspections were an intervention designed to improve the quality of schools and an argument can be made that they have been successful to some extent. But the question is, success for whom? This study suggests that the successes have been largely for the already privileged students and the owners of the high fee schools. Linking school fee hikes with the inspection outcomes has not fostered school improvements where they are most needed.

The assumption that a *one size fits all* quality framework is fair and inclusive, is arguably false. It is imperative that we continue to ask *what kind of social reproduction does this form of neoliberal private schooling promote, more specifically within the different contexts of schooling emerging globally?* The subjective terms by which we define *good* quality schooling need to be further debated in light of these findings. How we define *good* quality schooling has significant consequences for schools and their stakeholders.

5.2 Reflections on the study

An important part of a qualitative study is the ability to be critical and reflective (Bell, 1999; Wellington, 2000), both of which reinforce methodological rigour. This study was of significance because I used raw government inspection findings to attempt to test the hypothesis and answer related questions. This initially presented a range of methodological challenges, including how best to query the data. My

approach has gone some way towards addressing my hypotheses: however, in the process it has produced an abundance of data that requires further examination and raised further questions worthy of research. Additionally, the study could benefit from more information, such as the numbers of students in each phase and the hidden fees charged by schools, for books, transport, uniforms and other things. Although some variables were found to be consistently not significant to the model, when controlling for all other factors, such as type or phase, they were considered in order to allow for comparisons across different phases.

Throughout this study I have been aware that a study is only as good as the data and information in the individual case studies. The inspection methods and results, upon which my study is based, had moderate validity and reliability. However, I am conscious that the results, flawed as they may be, are considered factual by the government and policies are established based upon them, such as the fee hike increments.

My experience with school inspections has led me to make assumptions. I do not consider this to be a disadvantage, but I am aware that my prior knowledge will have led to a degree of subjectivity. Unfortunately, there were areas of my research in which there was a dearth of relevant literature to support and inform my work, such as the lack of literature on private schooling in the GCC, (Shaw, Badri, and Hukul, 1995) including, quality of schooling and the range of fees.

This study was grounded in the reality of school inspections for a specific period of time and the tuition fees for that time, with the aim of identifying trends. Since completing this study, the school inspection framework in Dubai has changed, new schools have opened and school fees have increased. Therefore, methodological caution should be taken if the findings of a replicated study using a recent framework are to be compared with the findings of this study, or when using the data set from this study.

5.3 Wider implications and further research

The lack of access to public schooling by the large number of expatriate workers in the GCC countries has resulted in a private school market in which schooling is for sale at varied prices. Access to what is determined as *good* or *outstanding* quality schooling by the authorities, appears to be reinforcing the divide between those who can afford the quality schooling and those who cannot.

Children enrolled in high fee charging schools are most likely to experience the best private schooling can offer and other schools may be limited in their ability to raise quality even if they could charge higher fees. Such limits may include poor leadership, indifferent ownership or the inability to appreciate, implement and manage better schooling. Some may be unaware that the change is needed in the first place. They may fear that raising fees would cause a drop in enrolment. Or they simply may not subscribe to the definitions of quality in the framework. School improvement is a complex process with many challenges, and simply introducing inspections and enforcing a fee framework and subsequent hikes to inspection outcomes is a rather simplistic 'solution'. Therefore it is important that this area is examined further.

This study focused on specific schools, further studies could be conducted using the same reports to test if the hypotheses still hold when using other less popular curricula and using other Quality Indicators. The use of alternative qualitative methods might be employed to test these hypotheses, bearing in mind the changes in the landscape. With the newly introduced unified UAE Inspection Framework 2015/2016, there are opportunities for comparative studies between the private schools in the different emirates using new inspection judgments.

The availability of public data on school inspection results and fees enabled the chosen method, and this was a first step to understanding the idiosyncratic neoliberal schooling context. This leads to discussions about whether or not other governments within the region should adopt the practice of linking school fees, or other monetary rewards such as coupons in Qatar, with inspection results on the quality of schooling? What might be the consequences of such a policy based on the findings of this research?

5.4 Summary

The UAE Government made a promise to provide world-class education to its nationals; the assumption being that this statement is aimed at the quality of public schooling, as my study shows that in Dubai, both UAE citizens and non-citizens in low fee and some middle fee private schools appear to be excluded from this promise. For those such as Giroux (2010), Madrick (2011) and Ferguson (2012), who advocate for a more reduced, if not absent, role to government education and seek to allow the private sector to organize and administer schooling by market driven forces, this study provides an indication as what some of the consequences may be.

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APPENDICIES

APPENDIX 1: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF INSPECTION

Inspections as case studies

In this study, I worked on the premise that school inspections were essentially sociological case studies, wherein each inspection was a descriptive, quantitative and qualitative investigation into the quality of schooling. Each school was considered an object of study, and inspections employed the main methods of a case study, as described by Marshall & Rossman (2015):

1. Inspectors were on-site to enquire into the quality of schools' provision and outcomes.

2. The information collected and analysed were from a range of sources such, including observations of lessons and activities throughout the school, interviews, document analysis (such as self-evaluation documents, action plans and curriculum documents) and analysing of opinion surveys. These will be examined later in this chapter. These are the most common sources of information used by researchers conducting case studies, but by no means the only, as Creswell (2007), for example, include audio-video visuals and Yin (2003) considers collected relevant artifacts a source of information. The latter two sources of evidence are not always applicable to school inspections, nevertheless there are inspectors who occasionally consider samples of students' work or portfolios to be physical artifacts.

3. Quantitative data and information were collected during the inspection period and were analysed by a team of inspectors who discussed their data, evidence and findings in team meetings. These discussions were anecdotal, descriptive, summative, and at times thematic.

School inspections do not conform to all the standard approaches of conducting case-study research, nor are they free of methodological shortcomings. As is discussed later in this chapter.

Inspection methods at the DSIB: a critical outline

In this section I demonstrate how the activities conducted in case studies were applied during school inspections, and discuss the strengths and shortcomings of each. Considering each case study to be a distinct empirical inquiry, the inspection reports provide the only continuous information about the quality of schooling in Dubai.

The inspection methods used in Dubai were not dissimilar to those in other countries as outlined by Matthews, et al. (1998), Wilcox (2000), Rosenthal (2003) and, Baxter and Hult (2013). Akin to the Ofsted inspection model, the DSIB inspectors were required to gather first-hand evidence by spending at least 60 per cent of their time observing lessons (Matthews, et al. ,1998; Baxter and Clarke, 2013). In addition to analysing examination data, inspectors gathered evidence from lesson observations, interviews and document analysis to make quality judgements on each of the individual QIs. Once an inspection was completed, a report was written with the judgements and explanatory text attempting to clarify the judgements. An overall judgement was made on the performance of school. Strengths were identified and recommendations for improvements made.

School inspections took place from October to April, over a period of approximately 27 weeks with six to 11 schools being inspected each week. The duration of school inspections varied from two days in the smaller Kindergartens to five days in the larger schools, where student numbers may exceed 8,000. One school conducted two shifts, morning and evening, due to the large number of students and limited facilities.

The school inspectors and inspection activities

Alongside its full time resident inspectors, the DSIB also contracted 300 visiting associate inspectors from other countries, mainly as curriculum experts for specific curriculum schools, such as the Russian, Japanese, Iranian and Pakistani schools. All inspectors worked to a code of conduct and evaluation criteria set out in the DSIB Inspection Framework and Handbook.

This large number of associate inspectors presented challenges to the inspection methods. To add credibility to the inspections, at least one inspector on each team had working experience of the curriculum of the school being inspected. For example when visiting the Japanese school, one of the inspectors deployed to the team must have had experience with the Japanese curriculum. Other team members generally relied on this associate inspector's knowledge of the curriculum as a guide to making judgements on the relevant QIs, such as attainment and progress of children and curriculum quality. The drawback was that it was not always possible to contract associate inspectors who had both specific curriculum experience and inspection experience. Consequently, the validity and reliability of the evidence alongside their judgements were questionable. Additionally, language was a barrier to understanding lesson contexts and discussions taking place between the students and the teachers. In the Japanese school, for example, inspectors relied on what little information they could understand, such as the numbers in maths, and the general topic being covered in science.

Similar to independently contracted inspectors used to conduct Ofsted inspections, who must have "successfully completed a training course concentrating on familiarisation with the Ofsted Framework and Handbooks and with related inspection requirements, and have been assessed as meeting Ofsted standards" (Matthews et al., 1998, p.169), associate inspectors attended familiarisation sessions on the DSIB inspection framework, methods and expectations. I do not mean to imply that the training and quality assurance of the Ofsted inspectors resulted in no methodological challenges, be that discrepancies of judgements or debates around their validity. The training received by Ofsted inspectors did not necessarily eliminate differences in judgements between inspectors (Baxter and Clarke, 2013), but some, such as Matthews et al. (1998) were able to demonstrate that at least amongst the most experienced and confident inspectors, judgements on teaching were reliable and consistent.

Associate inspectors brought with them various international educational backgrounds, and they enriched the internal debates of teams and at the police making within the inspectorate. However such diversity did bring varied understanding and appreciation of the contextual challenges faced by the DSIB, such

as the larges proportion of students being second language learners of English in schools where the language of teaching is English.

The DSIB relied upon the experience its associate inspectors to make fair and objective judgements. The experiences of most inspectors as retired school heads, retired or current Ofsted inspectors, meant that they brought a wealth of knowledge to the inspections. This experience combined with their worldviews and professional beliefs, informed their judgements or steered their inspection enquiries. The DSIB's heavy reliance on overseas inspectors meant that the inter-rater reliability was a concern since many of the visiting inspectors stayed for brief periods, had little understanding of Dubai's local context and brought their own agenda priorities with them. Invariably, this led to some inconsistencies within and amongst inspection reports. Although the DSIB inspection framework was generally a cohesive inspection tool, the methods of inspection, such as lesson observations, document analysis and interviews; lacked clear guidelines. Therefore, I am reluctant to argue that inspectors were absolutely objective in their judgements, all of which were later repackaged as *facts* in inspection and annual reports. My reluctance stems mainly from my acceptance of two premises; Putnam's (1990) argument that there is no single objective interpretation of the world, and Searle's (1995) claim that we do not create facts but descriptions of the world around us. In other words, inspectors, as observers and assessors, were preconditioned to being subjective to some degree. Consciously or subconsciously, they would have allowed their identities, experiences, beliefs, or the context of the inspection to shape their judgements. The varying degrees of influence theses factors had on the inspector, the more or less subjective an inspector may have been. Furthermore, as inspectors *described* the *world around them*, be it in lessons or during interviews, their descriptions of perceived reality did not necessarily lead to the establishment of objective facts. It is for such reasons one can state that quality assurance process were a key work of the inspectorate. The need to minimize subjectivity by conforming the subjective descriptions to a normative framework of reference, i.e. the inspection framework, would have led to more objective judgements, but not without some level of bias. I do not mean to imply that no subjectivity all is a desired attribute, on the contrary, the experience sought after in inspectors is by its nature subjective to each inspector, and it is that subjectivity that creates the wealth of experience for the DSIB to call

upon. This “experiential data”, as coined by Strauss (1987, p.11), of inspectors, if managed effectively and skillfully, should not be considered a negative bias that would compromise inspections. Rather, it should be considered as a positive perspective. Their insights added value to the inspections, in the form of validity and verification checks, triangulation of findings and when necessary re-directing the inspection. This was the responsibility of the quality assurance inspector: to alleviate unwanted subjectivity. Nevertheless, the subjectivity, a lack of inspection experience, inconsistency in understanding and applying the inspection framework, resulted in inconsistencies across inspections. Despite such inconsistencies, the overall judgements for the quality of schooling were for the most part accurate and the inspections generally worked. The reason I believe it worked was because inspectors may have (unknowingly) experienced a cognitive bias that influenced the inspection findings. The professional experience of most inspectors generally led them to search for, or interpret the information and data collected during an inspection in order to confirm their professional hypotheses or suspicions, otherwise known as c*onfirmation bias* (Nickerson, 1998). These hypotheses were established in the pre-inspection meetings. Experienced inspectors mainly focused on the perspectives that supported their *hunch,* and less experienced inspectors, who would have relied on their more experienced colleagues to *lead the way*, were to varying degrees affected by the findings of their colleagues. This form of *observational selection bias* (Nickerson, 1998) was a common practice in inspections.

Also, the less experienced inspectors tended to focus on the negative findings of inspections, thus having a significant impact on their judgements. This was most likely attributed to their cultural attitudes and perceiving inspections as fault-finding exercises. This inspection phenomenon is not peculiar to the GCC region, as Iqbal et al. (2013) and Dean (1995) have observed it elsewhere. Such attitudes to inspections were reported for example in Pakistan (Ahmed, et al., 2013) and in Kenya (Wanzare Zachariah, 2002). This phenomenon led some, like Gray and Gardner (1999) to argue that inevitably it effected the inspections by impacting the teachers and their performance. The fabrication of work and *window dressing* that would take place as a result, was observed and reported on by Ball (1997, 2001, 2003) and Perryman, (2009). Such strategies adopted by school leaders and teachers became a growing phenomenon across private schools in Dubai, but not just for the purpose of

minimising so called faults that could be found, as discussed by Ball and Perryman, but to guarantee an upward move in the overall judgement of the school, as fee hikes were, and remain, linked to overall school quality (Farooqui, 2012).

Another methodological problem worth considering is that almost all inspectors, lacked formal training in the social sciences, and across all the inspection instruments used and the method of the inspection, very few understood how to create, analyse and use the information from each of the tools. For example, the parental opinion survey was created in-house with little or no theoretical framework to the questions or structure. A lack of a clear and unified method for analysing the data combined with interpretations that were dependent on the lead inspector, all resulted in the feedback from the opinion survey's not being fully utilized.

Main inspection activities

I will now briefly examine each of the main activities conducted by inspectors during a DSIB inspection.

Observations

Inspectors conducted observations of a range of people and activities in schools. Sampling of lessons did not adhere to any academically accepted methods; rather a range of factors affected the lessons observed and sampling of lessons by inspectors.

During lesson observations, inspectors were required to fill in Evidence Recording Forms (ERFs) using free text that was both descriptive and evaluative; this was considered evidence to support a quality judgement for the QIs concerned. Inspectors were expected to uses numbers instead of judgement words in this part of the inspection process. These numbers were then entered into a spreadsheet that was used to perform calculations, I will discuss my concerns with this method later on this chapter.

Since the method for reaching a judgement on teaching was not formally prescribed by the DSIB, the overall judgement for each of the QIs arose from the inspector's professional judgement, mainly after weighing up the strengths and weakness of the teaching in light of the four quality level descriptors.

This is where literature shows that relative discrepancies between the judgements of some inspectors may arise, not only due to the lack of inspection guidelines, but also the varying cultural expectations of inspectors. Matthews et al., (1998) however, did demonstrate that the more confident and experienced inspectors at Ofsted were able to make reliable judgements about the quality of teaching by using a framework and supporting documents.

There were epistemological problems with the ways in which attainment was judged. Inspectors made judgements on students' attainment by estimating their skills, knowledge and understanding observed in lessons against the school's curriculum standards and the national expectations of the home country. Approximations were made of the percentage students across a phase who were below, in line, above or well above expectations, were key to making judgements on student's attainment.

The five editions of the Inspection handbook and its inspection framework from 2008 to 2013, remained vague and ambiguous on the terms used to determine the quality of attainment, such as *international benchmarks.* The single notion of attainment as outlined in the framework was not applicable to all the 15 different curricula in the private schools. Each had its own working conceptual understanding of attainment and range of standards to be attained. This epistemological concern brings into question the validity of the attainment judgements when making comparisons across different curricula, especially considering that the KHDA did not attempt to minimise such discrepancies by using national or Emirate wide standardised examinations in the key subjects. Not that this would solve the epistemological concern, but at least would minimise subjective team judgements as they relied upon individual professional experience to make such comparisons.

In the inspection paradigm employed by the DSIB, the attainment of students was considered to be an outcome of the school. This could be contested, as the effect of a school in a student's acquisition of English, for example, is one of many. According to Randall and Samimi (2010) "English has the de facto lingua franca status, particularly in Dubai" (2010, p. 43) and the use of English in everyday interactions may have an effect on their linguistic development, both positively and negatively. I

say negatively, because the spoken English in the community, as pointed out by Randall and Samimi (2010), has been widely influenced by the other languages used in Dubai and various forms of everyday spoken English emerged, such as the Indian English and Philippine English. These would most likely have an effect on a student's linguistic skills, and therefore the influences on their attainment in English cannot be credited as an outcome of the school alone. But not withstanding any of the above, the DSIB as a government entity has attributed the attainment of students, as per the inspection handbook, to the schools.

Interviews

Inspectors conducted interviews with many stakeholders at schools. Formal interviews were held on every inspection with school leaders, selected students, parents, counsellors, nurses and subject leaders. On some inspections security guards, janitors and cleaners were interviewed when issues surrounding health and safety were raised.

Informal interviews were conducted with students during lessons and recess periods as well as with teachers following lessons and at other opportunities. The main concern surrounding the interviews was that they were not scheduled, or controlled. Although initial guidance was provided to inspectors during training for the first year of inspections, it was never officially sanctioned, and inspectors did not all use the same script. I appreciate that not all inspectors should ask the exact same questions in every school, as each is different, but there should be some basic questions asked by all. It is fair to state that interviews were formal when an inspector was perusing specific key aspects of the framework, such as enquiring after one's role in the school improvement plan. Interviews could be considered informal when inspectors inquired after the opinion of students, such as asking what they liked about their school. Inspectors conducted formal non-scheduled and non-structured group interviews with parents. These parents were not a representative sample, and rarely were randomly selected. Chosen by the school one can assume that such a selection mean to represent the schools well.

Opinion surveys

The questions sought parents' opinions regarding the KQs and QIs and other matters, and sought parents' opinions regarding things that they would not have first hand knowledge of, such as the quality of teaching and learning and bullying. Seeking parents' opinions on such matters was subjective for the most part, as they were just opinions, and not highly valid. Throughout the literature both inspectors and researchers have questioned the value of parents' input. Wilcox and Gray (1995) pointed out that the trend amongst those completing questionnaires (or in this case opinion surveys) is that they often over-rate the school with positive views. Not surprisingly, this too was the case with most of the findings from the parental surveys over they five years (KHDA, 2009b; 2010a; 2011a; 2012a; 2013a).

4.4.4 Numeric values for qualitative judgements: a methodological concern

The DSIB inspectors judged the quality of schools' provision and outcomes using one of four adjectives: *unsatisfactory, acceptable, good* or *outstanding*. These four words refer to established *ordinal* categories that clearly indicate quality as from notions of quality in everyday experience. It is clear that *good* is better than *Acceptable* and that *Unsatisfactory* is worse. Yet the range of each is a spectrum and not a fixed point of quality. Inspectors assigned numbers to these four ordinal adjectives when making judgements, these were: *unsatisfactory* recorded as a 1, *acceptable* as a 2, *good* as a 3, *outstanding* as a 4.

The methodological concern is that inspectors used these interval numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4 to refer to qualities instead of using the adjectives, thus changed the meanings of *quality*. They created *quantities* out of qualities. The assumption made unwittingly by inspectors was that the difference between each category was the same and that mathematical and statistical calculations could then be applied; the worst features of a schools received a numerical value above zero. Not only were there four additional names for the quality of schools (i.e. 1, 2, 3 and 4), they were names that were used in calculations. Inspectors added and divided these numbers to arrive at overall judgements. For example, teaching that was *Acceptable* became twice what *Unsatisfactory* teaching was, and teaching that was *Good* was three times better. They calculated the average teaching score, rounded up or down. By doing, they so

determined quality by a statistical exercise, one that was not part of the Inspection Handbook. This methodological error was consolidated by the compulsory use of the DSIB spreadsheets that performed calculations on the numerical data. It was argued that this made school inspection work easier and more accurately, as numbers were '*facts'* that could not be disputed. Instead, this methodological error caused the meanings of inspection judgements to change, and consequently so did the conclusions those judgements led to. Qualities were regularly mistaken for *quantities*. This was not an unfamiliar problem to the Ofsted inspectors. They too used a grading system that caused some concern, as raised by Wilcox and Gray (1995) and others. Some inspectors would produce a norm referenced approach to evaluating lessons or other inspection activities, focusing on number and data rather than quality descriptors.

In almost all cases of school inspections, the frameworks for enquiry and the methods of inspection have developed outside of the formal social sciences. This was a concern raised by Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson (1996) as they stated that there was a lack of transparency by Ofsted, as the Office failed to disclose methodological weaknesses surrounding inspections. In addition to raising methodological concerns, Fitz-Gibbon and Stephenson discussed areas where Ofsted failed to conduct sufficient studies regarding the use of judgement scales. They compared Ofsted's methods to the standard methods used by social scientists using judgement scales. Specifically, questions of validity in the construction of school quality indicators had not been fully addressed. For example, Ofsted's four categories of school quality (outstanding, good, requires improvement, inadequate) carry both these names and the numerical values 1, 2, 3 and 4. Similar combinations of names and numbers were used in South Africa's *Whole School Evaluation* and in Hong Kong's *Quality Assurance* document (Hong Kong Education Bureau, 2008). Such evaluative scales are clearly arbitrary, and are complicated by the use of numbers.

Similarly, methods of inspection have not addressed the fundamental skills needed for robust sociological enquiry, such as interview scheduling, survey construction,

unobtrusive observation skills, data and document analysis and the bridging all of these skills by good methodological leadership.

Similar to Ofsted, the DSIB has not been clear in its publications about the methodological aspects of their inspections. This lack of clarity could be rationalised as not necessary, as it works within a political framework that does not require it to justify policies to the (non-tax paying) public. In line with this approach, the inspection of private schools by the Government has not been explained to the fee-paying parents, other than by the general statements of the KHDA's vision and mission that appear on its website. There has been very limited critical research conducted regarding school quality, inspections and the private schooling sector in Dubai, or the GCC region.

APPENDIX 2: Model Diagnosis

Summary of model's significance, classification and predictability for the four dependent variables.

	(Y = 1) Predicting the students' attainment as *good* or *outstanding* in			Quality of **teaching** is *good* or *outstanding*
	English	Mathematics	Science	
Model Chi square $\chi 2$ (11) =	167.010 ***	182.178 ***	153.475 ***	159.955 ***
Nagelkerke R^2	47%	50.2%	52.1%	45.3%
Block 0: Percentage correct	51%	52.1%	51.3%	53.4%
Block 1: Correctly classify Y=1	74.5%	74.6%	70.2%	69.4%
Correctly classify Y=0	74.7%	78.9%	79.3%	81.7%
Overall correct classification	74.6%	76.7%	74.9%	75.1%

Note: Overall sample N=386, no missing cases, the significance of the Model Chi square is shown by **p<.0005; ***p<.0001. *Block 0:* is Block 0: Beginning Block, *Block 1:* is Block 1: Method = Enter